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THE HOLYHEAD ROAD

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Cycle Rides Round London.

THE "WONDER," LONDON AND SHREWSBURY COACH. *From a Print after J. Pollard.*

THE HOLYHEAD ROAD: THE MAIL-COACH ROAD TO DUBLIN

By CHARLES G. HARPER

Author of "*The Brighton Road*," "*The Portsmouth Road*," "*The Dover Road*," "*The Bath Road*," "*The Exeter Road*," "*The Great North Road*," and "*The Norwich Road*"

Illustrated by the Author, and from Old-Time Prints and Pictures

Vol. I. LONDON TO BIRMINGHAM

LONDON: CHAPMAN & HALL LTD. 1902

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1

"THE olden days of travelling, now to return no more, in which distance could not be vanquished without toil"—those are the days mourned by Ruskin, who had little better acquaintance with them than afforded by his childish journeys, when his father, a prosperous wine-merchant, travelled the country in a carriage with a certain degree of style. Regrets are, under such circumstances, easily to be understood, just as were those of the old coach-proprietors, innkeepers, coachmen, postboys, and all who depended upon road-travel for their existence; but few among travellers who lived in the days when the change was made from road to rail had feelings of that kind, else railways would not have proved so immediately successful. It has been left for a later era to discover the charm and rosy glamour of old road-faring days, a charm not greatly insisted upon in the literature of those times, which, instead of being rich in praise of the road, is fruitful in accounts of the miseries

of travel. Pepys, on the Portsmouth Road in 1668, *fearful of losing his way at night, as had often happened to him before; Thoresby, in* 1714 *and later years, on the Great North Road, thanking God that he had reached home safely; Horace Walpole, on the Brighton Road in* 1749, *finding the roads almost impassable, therefore, and reasonably enough, "a great damper of curiosity"; Arthur Young for years exhausting the vocabulary of abuse on roads in general; and Jeffrey in* 1831, *at Grantham, looking dismally forward to being snowed up at Alconbury Hill—these are a few instances, among many, which go to prove, if proof were necessary, that travelling was regarded then as a wholly unmitigated evil.*

But, quite apart from such considerations, there is a charm clinging about the bygone and the out-of-date wholly lacking in things contemporary. The Romans who constructed and travelled along their roads could not find in them the interest we discover, and the old posting-houses and inns frequented by our grandfathers must have seemed to them as matter-of-fact as we now think our own railway hotels. It is, indeed, just BECAUSE *the old roads and the wayside inns are superseded by the rail and the modern hotel, and because they are altogether removed from the everyday vulgarity of use and competition, that they have assumed their romantic aspect,*

together with that which now surrounds the slow and inconvenient coaches and the harmful unnecessary highwayman, long since become genuine antiques and puppets for the historical novelist to play with.

The HOLYHEAD ROAD, *in its long course towards the Irish Sea, holds much of this old romance, and not a little of a newer sort. Cities whose history goes back to the era of the Saxons who first gave this highway the name of "Watling Street," lie along these many miles; and other cities and towns there are whose fame and fortunes are of entirely modern growth. Some have decayed, more have sprung into vigorous life, and, in answer to the demand that arose, a hundred years ago, for improved roads, the old highway itself was remodelled, in the days that are already become distant.*

But better than the cities and towns and villages along these two hundred and sixty miles is the scenery, ranging from the quiet pastoral beauties of the Home Counties to the rocks and torrents, the mountains and valleys of North Wales. This road and its story are a very epitome of our island's scenery and history. History of the larger sort—that tells of the setting up and the putting down of Kings and Princes—has marched in footprints of blood down the road, and left a trail of fire and ashes; but it may well be thought, with one who

has written the history of the English people, that the doings of such are not all the story: that the village church, the mill by the riverside, the drowsy old town, "the tolls of the market-place, the brasses of its burghers in the church, the names of its streets, the lingering memory of its guilds, the mace of its mayor, tell us more of the past of England than the spire of Sarum or the martyrdom of Canterbury."

CHARLES G. HARPER.

PETERSHAM,
SURREY,
April 1902.

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THE HOLYHEAD ROAD

London to Birmingham

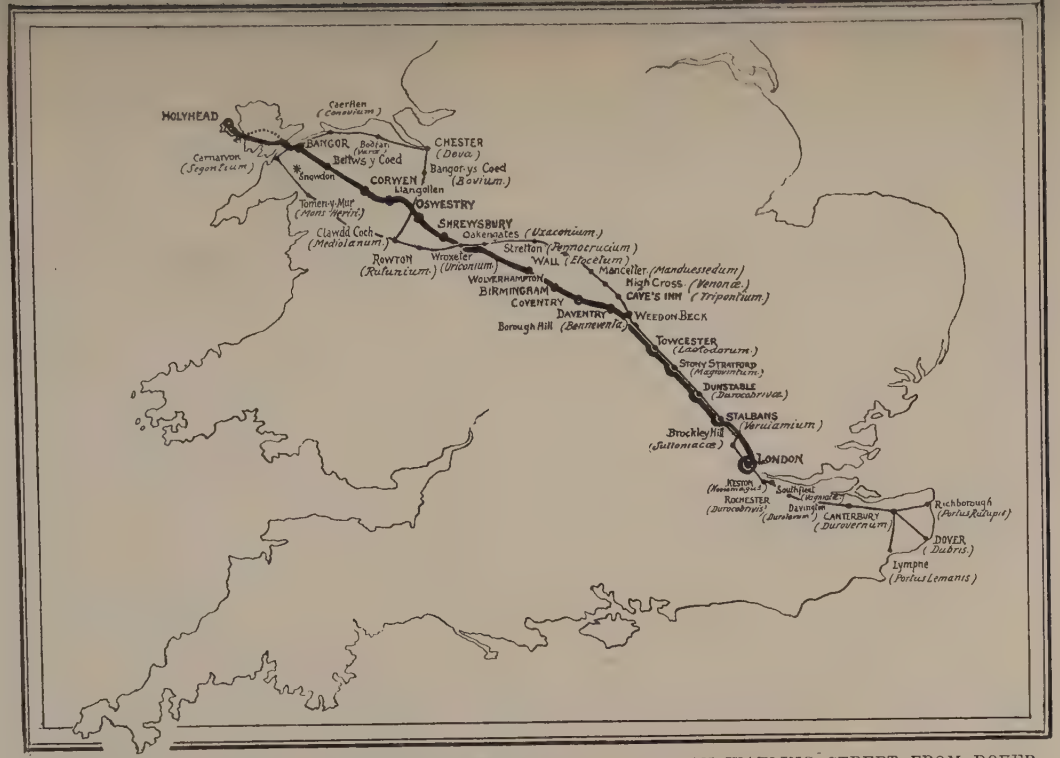
	MILES
London (General Post Office) to—	
Islington (the "Angel")	1¼
Highgate Archway	4¼
East End, Finchley	5¾
Brown's Wells, Finchley Common ("Green Man")	7
North Finchley: "Tally-ho Corner"	7½
Whetstone	9¼
Greenhill Cross	10¼
Barnet	11¼
South Mimms	14½
Ridge Hill	16
London Colney	17½
(Cross River Colne.)	
St. Albans ("Peahen")	20¾
Redbourne	25
Friar's Wash	27½
Markyate	29
Dunstable	33½
Hockliffe	37½
Sheep Lane	41
Little Brickhill	45
Fenny Stratford	48
(Cross River Ousel.)	
Stony Stratford	52¼
Old Stratford	52¾
(Cross River Ouse.)	

	MILES
Potterspury	55
Havencote Houses	59
Towcester ("Pomfret Arms")	60¼
(Cross River Towe.)	
Foster's Booth	64
(Cross River Nen.)	
Weedon Beck	68
(Watling Street branches off from Holyhead Road.)	
Dodford	68¾
Daventry	72½
Braunston	75¾
Willoughby	77
Dunchurch	80¼
Ryton-on-Dunsmore	84½
(Cross River Avon.)	
Willenhall	88¾
(Cross River Sow.)	
Coventry ("King's Head")	91¼
Allesley	93¾
Meriden	97
Stonebridge	100
(Cross River Tame.)	
Bickenhill	101½
Elmdon	102¼
Wells Green	104
Yardley	105¼
Hay Mills	106¼
Small Heath	106¾
Bordesley	108
Deritend	108½
Birmingham (General Post Office)	109¼

The Watling Street, from Weedon Beck to Oakengates and Ketley

	MILES
Weedon Beck to—	
Watford Gap	5½
Crick Railway Station	9
Lilbourne	12½
Catthorpe Five Houses	12¾
Cave's Inn	14¼
Gibbet	15
(Cross River Swift.)	
Cross-in-Hand	17¼
Willey Railway-crossing	18
Wibtoft	20
High Cross	21
Smockington	22
Caldecote	30
Witherley	31½
(Cross River Anker.)	
Mancetter	32
Atherstone	32½
Baddesley Ensor	36
Dordon	36½
Stony Delph	39
Wilnecote	39½
(Cross River Tame.)	
Fazeley	40¼
Hints	42¾
Weeford	44½

	MILES
(Cross-road, Lichfield to Coleshill)	$44\frac{3}{4}$
(Cross-road, Lichfield to Birmingham)	$46\frac{1}{4}$
Wall	$47\frac{1}{4}$
Muckley Corner	$48\frac{1}{4}$
Hammerwich	$49\frac{1}{2}$
Brownhills	51
Wyrley Bank	$54\frac{3}{4}$
"Four Crosses," Hatherton	57
Gailey Railway Station (L. & N. W. R.) (Cross River Penk.)	$59\frac{3}{4}$
Horsebrook and Stretton	$61\frac{1}{2}$
Ivetsey Bank ("Bradford Arms")	65
Weston-under-Lizard	67
Crackley Bank	$69\frac{1}{2}$
St. George's (Pain's Lane Chapel	$72\frac{1}{2}$
Oakengates	$73\frac{3}{4}$
Ketley Railway Station	$75\frac{1}{4}$



SKETCH MAP OF THE HOLYHEAD ROAD, SHOWING ALSO THE ROMAN WATLING STREET FROM DOVER AND THE ROMAN STATIONS ON THE WAY.

HOLYHEAD ROAD ▬▬▬ WATLING STREET ———

TELFORD'S NEW ROAD THROUGH ANGLESEY - - - - - - - -

I

"Peace hath its victories, no less renowned than war;" and there is nothing more remarkable than the engineering triumphs that land the Irish Member of Parliament, fresh from the Division Lobby at Westminster, at North Wall, Dublin, spouting treason, in nine hours and a quarter, or bring the Irish peasant, with the reek of the peat-smoke still in his clothes, and the mud of his native bogs not yet dried on his boots. to Euston in the same space of time.

But a hundred years ago, when the peaceful labours of the engineer had not begun to annihilate space and time, and the Union of Great Britain and Ireland had only just been effected, no such ready transit was possible, and our great-grandfathers reckoned their journeys between the two capitals in days instead of hours. The Holyhead Road, known to our fathers and ourselves, was not in existence; and Liverpool (and even Parkgate, near Chester) was as often

the point of embarkation for Ireland as Holyhead. The journey from London to Dublin was then of uncertain length, determined by such fluctuating conditions as the season of the year, the condition of the roads, and the winds of St. George's Channel — sometimes smooth, but more often stormy.

What the road was, and what it became, shall be the business of these pages to relate.

* * * * *

Close upon two hundred years ago, then, when Queen Anne was just dead, and the Elector of Hanover had ascended the throne of England as George I., the way to Holyhead was, in great measure, an affair of individual taste and fancy. Some travellers went by way of Oxford and Worcester, others by Woburn, Northampton, Lutterworth, Stafford, Nantwich, and Chester; some kept the route now known as the Holyhead Road as far as Stonebridge, on the other side of Coventry, and thence by Castle Bromwich and Aldridge Heath; others followed it past Shrewsbury and turned off at Chirk for Wrexham; while others yet had their own preferences, and reached Holyhead goodness knows how—themselves, perhaps, least of all. Those were the times when, as Pennant tells us, the hardy country gentlemen rode horseback. Thickly wrapped in riding cloaks, and with jackboots up to their hips, they splashed through mud and mire, making light of occasional falls, and so journeyed between London and Holyhead in

perhaps six days, if they were both active and fortunate. Those travellers commonly rode post-horses, changing their mounts at well-known stages on the way. The system took its origin from the establishment of postmasters by the Post Office in 1635, when the charge for an able horse was $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ a mile. None but duly authorised persons were then permitted to supply horses. In 1658, according to an advertisement in the *Mercurius Politicus*, the mileage had become $3d.$ As time went on this monopoly was abolished, and most innkeepers supplied horses for those hardy riders who despised the new-fangled coaches. The earliest mention of a coach on this road is found in the above-named paper, under date of April 9th, 1657: "For the convenient accommodation of passengers from and betwixt London and West Chester, there is provided several stage-coaches, which go from the George Inn, without Aldersgate, upon every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday—to Coventry in two days, for twenty-five shillings; to Stone in three days, for thirty shillings; and to Chester in four days, for thirty-five shillings; and from thence do return upon the same days, which is performed with much ease to the passengers, having fresh horses once a day."

It may shrewdly be surmised that, as the Chester coach of 1739, mentioned by Pennant, did not succeed in performing the journey under six days, the coach of 1657 did not find it possible to do it in four; and this suspicion seems

warranted by an advertisement in the *Mercurius Politicus* of March 24th, 1659, probably emanating from the same persons:—

"These are to give notice, that from the George Inn, without Aldersgate, goes every Monday and Thursday a coach and four able horses, to carry passengers to Chester in five days, likewise to Coventry, Cosell (Coleshill), Cank, Litchfield, Stone, or to Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Shrewsbury, Newport, Whitchurch, and Holywell, at reasonable rates, by us, who have performed it two years.

"William Dunstan.
"Henry Earle.
"William Fowler."

It will be observed that an alternative route, through Birmingham, is announced, probably to suit the wishes of those who might chance to book seats. The travelling was by no means comfortable, and in 1663 a young gentleman is found writing to his father: "I got to London on Saturday last; my journey was noe way pleasant, being forced to ride in the boote all the way. The company that came up with me were persons of greate qualitie, as knightes and ladyes. This travell hath soe indisposed mee, that I am resolved never to ride up again in the coatch." He probably rode post ever afterwards.

In 1681 a coach was running (or crawling)

between London and Shrewsbury, by way of Newport Pagnell. Sir William Dugdale, travelling by it from London to Coleshill, says: "The first night we stopped at Woburn, the second at Hill Morton, near Rugby, and on the third we proceeded to Coleshill." Thence it went along the old Chester Road to Aldridge Heath and Brownhills, and by the Watling Street from that point to Wellington. This Shrewsbury stage was robbed on January 30th, 1703, in the neighbourhood of Brownhills, by a gang of men and women, who, after they had plundered the passengers, met three county attorneys, whom they also robbed. One of the attorneys had what is described as a "porte mantel." In it, among other things, was a pair of shoes, in which the owner had hidden twenty guineas. The thieves threw the shoes away, and when they had departed he happily regained this most valuable portion of his luggage. Other wayfarers were not so fortunate on encountering this hybrid gang of desperadoes; for, ten days later, when two drovers, fresh from Newcastle Fair, with bags of money in their pockets, came jogging along the road, they were set upon and robbed. One was killed and the other dangerously wounded. Two days after this exploit, growing bolder, the gang attacked the High Sheriff of Staffordshire, with his lady and servants, coming from Lichfield Fair, took sixty guineas, and cut off one of the servants' hands. This was too impudent: the country was scoured, and these

murderous ruffians seized. They numbered nine in all, and of them three were women dressed in men's clothes.

In 1702 the "Wolverhampton and Birmingham Flying Stage Coach" was announced, to go once a week to London, in three days, and set out on the return from the "Rose," in Smithfield, every Thursday; but this enterprise seems to have been short-lived. Meanwhile, the Chester stage of 1657 and 1659 was still pursuing its steady way; proposing to go the journey in five days, but taking six. The difference between promise and performance is neatly illustrated by Pennant. "In March 1739," he says, "I changed my Welsh school for one nearer the capital, and travelled in the Chester stage, then no despicable vehicle for country gentlemen. The first day, with much labour, we got from Chester to Whitchurch, 20 miles; the second day to the 'Welsh Harp'; the third, to Coventry; the fourth, to Northampton; the fifth, to Dunstable; and, as a wondrous effort, on the last to London, before the commencement of night. The strain and labour of six good horses, sometimes eight, drew us through the sloughs of Mireden and other places. We were constantly out two hours before day, and as late at night; and in the depth of winter proportionably later. Families which travelled in their own carriages contracted with Benson & Co., and were dragged up in the same number of days by three sets of able horses."

"The single gentlemen, then a hardy race,

equipped in jack-boots and trousers up to their middle, rode post through thick and thin, and, guarded against the mire, defying the frequent stumble and fall, arose and pursued their journey with alacrity: while in these days their enervated posterity sleep away their rapid journeys in easy chaises, fitted for the conveyance of the soft inhabitants of Sybaris."

The roads at this time were incredibly bad, no matter the route, and indeed these several ways had their differences originated and continually multiplied by certain lengths of road being impassable at one season, and others equally so on some other occasion. When they were *all* impassable at one and the same time—a not unusual occurrence—the traveller was indeed in evil case, and the highwayman suffered from great depression of trade. The chief fount of information for travellers at that time was Ogilby's *Britannia*, first printed in 1675; a work of which much more will presently be said. This was a thick folio volume containing engraved plates and descriptions of every road in England. Every considerable inn kept a copy of "Ogilby" in those days, for the information of travellers; just as in the modern hotel one finds railway time-tables and county directories as a matter of course. Ogilby was in great request as a work of reference; so greatly indeed, that the early road travellers who thumbed his pages at meal-times and upset their wine over him, or now and again stole a particularly useful

map, have rendered clean and perfect copies of early editions not a little difficult to come by. He was much too bulky for carrying about, and so the careful traveller made notes and extracts for use from day to day. Such an excerpt is the yellow and tattered sheet before the present writer, giving manuscript details of how to reach Coventry. But besides copied matter there is a good deal else drawn doubtless from first-hand observation. Coming for instance, to "ffinchley Comon, att y^e^ galowes keep to y^e^ right hande" is the direction, and the whole distance is punctuated with the remarks "bad waye," "a slowe," and other signs indicating depths of mud and ruggedness of road. "Galowes," too, recurs with dreadful frequency, probably not because the person who wrote this wanted (like the Fat Boy in *Pickwick*) to "make yer flesh creep," or because he was morbidly minded, but for the commonplace reason that gallows made excellent landmarks, and were as common objects of the road then as signposts are now.

Dean Swift is the great classic figure on the Holyhead Road at this period; although, to be sure, a very elusive and shadowy one, so far as records of his journeys are concerned. He, too, like Pennant's hardy single gentlemen, commonly rode horseback, and has left traces of his presence here and there along the road, generally in witty and biting epigrams, written with a diamond ring on the windows of wayside inns. There could scarce, at this time, be anything more

naïvely amusing than the pleased surprise he exhibits in a letter written to Pope in 1726, at "the quick change" he made in seven days from London to Dublin "through many nations and languages unknown to the civilised world," when he had expected the enterprise, "with moderate fortune," to occupy ten or eleven. "I have often reflected," he adds, "in how few hours with a swift horse or a strong gale, a man may come among a people as unknown to him as the antipodes."

II

THE question, "How far to Holyhead?" had in old days been a difficult one to answer. It was not only in the uncertainty and variety of routes that the difficulty of accurately measuring the number of miles lay, but in the wild and conflicting ideas as to what really constituted a mile. This uncertainty lasted until the middle of the eighteenth century, when the first milestones since the days of the Romans were erected. It was, in fact, not before 1750, when, as part of their statutory obligations, the numerous Turnpike Trusts began to erect their milestones, that distances began to be publicly and correctly measured. It had already long been known that the mileages computed by the Post Office, in dealing with postmasters and the mails, were

very inaccurate throughout the country, and for many years previously compilers of road-books had been accustomed to print two tables of distances; one the "computed" and Post Office mile, and the other the measured mile.

The first of English makers of road-books, John Ogilby, mentioned this discrepancy, so early as 1675, when he published his great work, *Britannia*. Ogilby who had been commissioned by Charles II. to survey the roads and measure them, did his work thoroughly. He claims to have travelled 40,000 miles in compiling his book, a folio volume of great typographical beauty and exquisitely engraved plans of the roads. In making his survey, he used what he calls a "wheel dimensurator." Exactly what this was is shown in the beautifully etched title-page by Hollar, to his first edition, where Ogilby himself is seen on horseback, directing the course of two men; one wheeling the instrument, the other checking its measurements. It apparently was a wheel fitted with a handle and wound with a ten-mile length of tape. Trundled along, it unwound the tape, the intermediate distances being noted down by the assistant. Ogilby very soon discovered that although the Post Office gave the mileage to Birmingham and Holyhead respectively as 89 and 208 miles, it was then really 116 and 269 miles. The Post Office mile, which he calls the "vulgar computation," was therefore practically a third larger than our so-called Statute Mile, dating from 1593 and

constituted by a statute of the 35th year of Queen Elizabeth's reign, not so much for the purpose of creating a standard of measurement for the kingdom, as for defining certain limits. That Statute was passed by a Legislature dismayed by the rapid growth of London, and was an enactment forbidding persons to build within three miles of the capital. When it came to the point of defining a mile, it was found that no such measure had ever been officially fixed, and that English, Irish, Scottish, and local miles were of variable lengths. The mile was then taken to be eight "forty-longs," or furlongs, of forty perches each; a perch to consist of $5\frac{1}{2}$ yards.

That this extraordinary difference between actual distances and those computed by the Post Office should have arisen on all roads is inexplicable, and that it should have remained after Ogilby's official measurements had proved the "computed" miles utterly wrong is an astonishing proof of the vitality of error. But the real trouble arose with the appearance of milestones along the turnpike roads. They were the cause of much bitterness and contention between postmasters and the Post Office, and between keepers of posting-houses and travellers.

Those who did business for the Post Office claimed extra mileage, and travellers posting to or from Birmingham and Holyhead found themselves charged in the aggregate for 27 or 62 miles extra, as the case might be; which, say at 1*s.* 3*d.* a mile for chaise and four horses,

was a consideration. Travellers resented this difference and pointed out that, if posting establishments could always have afforded to do certain stages at certain prices, they could continue so to do; to which those men of horses and carriages replied by pointing out that the milestones were official and that they themselves paid more carriage duty on the extra mileage; a generally conclusive retort.

III

The earliest coaches made no pretence of taking the traveller to Holyhead. Chester was the *ultima thule* of wheeled conveyance when Sir William Dugdale and Pennant kept diaries, or when Swift wrote. We have already seen that the Chester stage took six days, and therefore the horrors of the journey described by Swift about the year 1700, were protracted as well as acute. Whether or not he ever really made the journey by coach is uncertain, but if so, he certainly for ever after rode horseback. But here is his picture of such an experience:—

> Resolv'd to visit a far-distant friend,
> A Porter to the Bull and Gate I send,
> And bid the man, at all events, engage
> *Some* place or other in the Chester stage.
> The man returns—"'Tis done as soon as said;
> Your Honour's sure when once the money's paid.

YARD OF THE "BULL AND MOUTH," ST. MARTIN'S-LE-GRAND. *From an old Print.*

My brother whip, impatient of delay,
Puts to at three and swears he cannot stay."
(Four dismal hours before the break of day.)
Rous'd from sound sleep—thrice call'd—at length I rise,
Yawning, stretch out my arm, half-closed my eyes;
By steps and lanthorn enter the machine,
And take my place—how cordially!—between
Two aged matrons of excessive bulk,
To mend the matter, too, of meaner folk;
While in like mood, jamm'd in on t'other side,
A bullying captain and a fair one ride,
Foolish as fair, and in whose lap a boy—
Our plague eternal, but *her* only joy.
At last, the glorious number to complete,
Steps in my landlord for that bodkin seat;
When soon, by ev'ry hillock, rut, and stone,
Into each other's face by turns we're thrown.
This grandam scolds, *that* coughs, the captain swears,
The fair one screams and has a thousand fears;
While our plump landlord, train'd in other lore,
Slumbers at ease, nor yet asham'd to snore;
And Master Dicky, in his mother's lap,
Squalling, at once brings up three meals of pap.
Sweet company! Next time, I do protest, Sir,
I'd walk to Dublin, ere I'd ride to Chester!

This engine of torture was, however, well patronised.

The first stage-coach to ply between London and Holyhead was the conveyance promoted chiefly by that enterprising Shrewsbury innkeeper, Robert Lawrence. It started in 1780, and went through Coventry, Castle Bromwich, Birmingham, Walsall, Wolverhampton, Shrewsbury, Llangollen, Corwen, and Conway, thus keeping pretty closely to the course taken by the modern Holyhead Road. It lay the first night

at Castle Bromwich, the second at Oswestry, and the third (if God permitted) at Holyhead. Five years later (in the summer of 1785) the first mail-coach to Chester and Holyhead was established, going by Northampton, Welford, Lutterworth, Hinckley, Atherstone, Tamworth, Lichfield, Wolseley Bridge, Stafford, Eccleshall, Woore, Nantwich, Tarporley, Chester, and St. Asaph. This, the only mail route to Holyhead until 1808, measured 278 miles 7 furlongs, and was the longest of all ways. Other roads for many years led by Oxford and Stratford-on-Avon, and were used by some of the smartest coaches to the end of the coaching age; but the shortest route, the great "Parliamentary" road to Holyhead, measures 260½ miles. In 1808 the London, Birmingham, and Shrewsbury Mail, through Oxford, was extended to Holyhead, going by Llangollen, Corwen, and Capel Curig. It ran thus until 1817, when it was transferred to the direct Coventry route. The Holyhead Road had then begun to be reformed, and the direct Mail took precedence over the old "Holyhead and Chester Mail," still going by its old course.

The "New Holyhead Mail," as it was officially named, then started from the "Swan with Two Necks," in Lad Lane, every evening at 7.30, and took 38 hours about the business. In 1826, the year when the Menai Bridge was opened, the time was cut down to 32¾ hours, and in 1830 to 29 hours 17 minutes, the mail arriving at Holyhead at 1.17 on the second morning after it

had left London. In 1836 and the last two years of its existence, the journey was performed in 26 hours 55 minutes; the arrival timed for 10.55 p.m.

Here is the time-bill for that last and best achievement:—

Miles.				
	London	dep.	8.0	P.M.
15	South Mimms	arr.	9.40	,,
25	Redbourne	,,	10.44	,,
45	Little Brickhill	,,	12.32	A.M.
52¼	Stony Stratford	,,	1.26	,,
60¼	Towcester	,,	2.12	,,
72½	Daventry	,,	3.25	,,
80¼	Dunchurch	,,	4.11	,,
91¼	Coventry	,,	5.18	,,
100	Stonebridge	,,	6.8	,,
109¼	Birmingham	arr.	7.8	,,
		dep.	7.43	,,
117¼	Wednesbury	arr.	8.28	,,
122¼	Wolverhampton	,,	9.1	,,
137½	Shiffnal	,,	10.14	,,
141½	Haygate	,,	10.59	,,
152	Shrewsbury	arr.	11.59	,,
		dep.	12.4	P.M.
160½	Nesscliff	arr.	12.53	,,
170	Oswestry	,,	1.46	,,
182½	Llangollen	,,	2.58	,,
192½	Corwen	arr.	3.55	,,
		dep.	4.0	,,
198¼	Tynant	arr.	5.1	,,
205¾	Cernioge	,,	5.39	,,
220	Capel Curig	,,	7.2	,,
228	Tyn-y-Maes	,,	7.46	,,
234	Bangor	arr.	8.20	,,
		dep.	8.25	,,
237	Menai Bridge	arr.	8.43	,,
247½	Mona Inn	,,	9.43	,,
260½	Holyhead	,,	10.55	,,

The man who made that achievement possible was Thomas Telford. Long before his aid was sought, the question of improving the communications between the two countries had become a burning one. The Irish members, meeting no longer on St. Stephen's Green, had a grievance in the circumstance of their journeys to the Imperial Parliament at Westminster being both tedious and hazardous, and this question of road-reform was the first raised by them. The Government, in reply, appointed a Commission; Rennie, the foremost engineer of his day, was called in to advise upon the harbours of Holyhead and Howth, and Telford in 1810 to plan the road improvements.

Exactly what the road was like before it was improved under Telford, let the Report of the Commissioners on Holyhead Roads and Harbours tell:—"Many parts are extremely dangerous for a coach to travel upon. From Llangollen to Corwen the road is very narrow, long, and steep; has no side fence, except about a foot and a half of mould or dirt, thrown up to prevent carriages falling down three or four hundred feet into the river Dee. Stage-coaches have been frequently overturned and broken down from the badness of the road, and the mails have been overturned. Between Maerdy, Pont-y-Glyn, and Dinas Hill, there are a number of dangerous precipices, steep hills, and difficult narrow turnings. At Dinas Hill the width of the road is not more than twelve feet at the steepest part of the hill, and

with a deep precipice on one side; two carriages cannot pass without the greatest danger. At Ogwen Pool there is a very dangerous place, where the water runs over the road; extremely difficult to pass at flooded times." Arrived at Bangor there were the dangers of the ferry to be braved, and, after these, 26 miles of the perilous old road across Anglesey, even now to be traced by those curious in these things. What travelling to Holyhead and Dublin was like in those old times may best be shown by quoting an old diary of 1787, of an expedition from Grosvenor Square, London. The party consisted of a coach and four, a post-chaise and pair, and five outriders. They reached Holyhead in four days (expenses, so far, £77 1*s.* 3*d.*), and crossed St. George's Channel at a further cost of £37 2*s.* 1*d.*; and cheap, too, as times then were.

The first idea of the Government towards improving the road was to indict twenty-one townships between Shrewsbury and Holyhead. It would have been an excellent notion, only for the fact that those places were quite unable to find the penalties actually recoverable at law, much less to reconstruct the road. A larger view of the necessities of the case had to be taken. The nation was already pledged to the construction of two harbours, and to the nation now fell the duty of making access to Holyhead Harbour moderately safe. The first practical result was the selection of Telford as engineer,

to survey and report upon the 109 miles between Shrewsbury and Holyhead. Telford had already carried out many improvements for the Government in the Highlands, and had, years before, as Surveyor to the County of Salop and Engineer of the Ellesmere Canal, acquired a thorough knowledge of the road through North Wales. He made a survey in 1811, but it was not until 1815 that the Government finally adopted his report and that of the Commissioners, and the Treasury found the money for the work. It was then decided that improvements should be made along the whole length of road between London and Holyhead, but that the Shrewsbury to Holyhead portion being incomparably the worst, it should have the first attention. In the course of five years this first part of the work was completed. The general line of the old road was followed, along the valley of the Dee, and thence from Corwen, across the watershed to the Vale of Conway and to the summit-level at Ogwen Pool; descending from that point by the valley of Nant Ffrancon to Bangor and the Menai Straits. There a quarter of a mile of stormy water still separated the Isle of Anglesey from the mainland, and it was not until the January of 1826 that it was bridged. From the Anglesey side of the Straits an entirely new and direct road was made across the island to Holyhead, saving three miles, and giving a level route, instead of the precipitous old way.

In the result, the Holyhead Road through

North Wales may, without hesitation, be pronounced the finest in the land. Passing though it does through the wildest scenery, nowhere is the gradient steeper than 1 in 20, while its width, from 28 to 34 feet, and its splendid surface render it safe and convenient. The old road, frequently as steep as 1 in $6\frac{1}{2}$, and with its sides unprotected from the cliffs and torrents that terrified bygone generations, has almost wholly vanished under the new; but in those places where Telford did not merely remodel it, and took an entirely new line, its character may still be seen.

In 1820 the London to Shrewsbury portion of the work was begun, and the greater part completed by 1828. Minor improvements were made on it from time to time in after years, but it does not nearly compare with the more thorough work undertaken through North Wales. Parts remain rich in very steep hills, and powerful interests situated in the larger towns vetoed the cutting of new routes through crooked and awkward approaches, and so have left much to be desired. Telford himself died, in his seventy-seventh year, in 1834, but the Holyhead Road Commissioners were in existence for years afterwards, and continued to send forth Reports until 1851. For a long period, however, before that time those documents, containing as they do only the surveyors' reports as to the condition of the road and bridges, have nothing of interest. The last paper of importance is the Parliamentary

Return of 1839, giving the sum of the expenses incurred on the whole length of road, including improvement of the road from Bangor to Chester, and cost of building the Menai and Conway bridges. The total amount was £697,963 14*s.* 9*d.*, of that sum £164,489 7*s.* 9*d.* was granted by Parliament towards the work as a national undertaking: the remaining £533,474 7*s.* 0*d.* lent by the Treasury, to be repaid by the Commissioners out of the tolls. In 1839, according to a return made to Parliament by the Office of Woods and Forests, £250,880 5*s.* 9¼*d.* had been thus repaid. That very little of the balance found its way back to the Treasury may confidently be asserted. But, however that matter stands, certainly the work was done with rigid economy and, considering its nature and extent, at a very small cost.

Some part of the cost of the improved road fell upon the letter writers of that day. The postage of a letter to Ireland was sixteen pence, made up of the following items:—

	s.	*d.*
Inland postage to Holyhead	1	0
Conway Bridge	0	1
Menai „	0	1
Sea postage	0	2
	1	4

It made no difference that the direct Holyhead Mail went nowhere near the Conway Bridge: letters for Ireland were still charged

that penny, until Penny Postage came in 1841 and treated all places in the United Kingdom alike.

IV

Meanwhile, stage-coaching had also been revolutionised. The growth of Birmingham and the great commercial industries of the Midlands had rendered the old methods too slow and cumbrous; and the ancient coaches, supported on leather straps, and with curtained windows, starting once, twice or thrice a week, according to distance travelled, performing their slow and toilsome pilgrimages by daylight and resting at sundown, gave place to the well-appointed vehicles, hung on steel springs, and with glazed windows, that ran from either end, every day, and continued their journeys throughout the night. No longer was it possible to drive the same wretched animals the whole length of the weary day, but changes at every ten or twelve miles came into vogue, and speed consequently increased. The greatest period of coaching on the Holyhead Road dawned in 1823, when the London and Birmingham "Tally-Ho" began to run. This was often called "Mountain's Tally-Ho," being horsed out of London by Mrs. Sarah Ann Mountain, of the "Saracen's Head," Snow

Hill. It was a day coach, and one of the first to run "double," that is to say, with up and down coaches every day. It left London at 7.45 a.m. and Birmingham at 7 a.m. Its popularity was very soon challenged by eager competitors, for in the following year the "Independent Tally-Ho" was put on the road by Horne, of the "Golden Cross," Charing Cross, starting an hour and a quarter earlier from London, and a quarter of an hour earlier from Birmingham, with the idea of securing the "Tally-Ho's" custom. From this time, coaches of this popular name multiplied until their number was quite bewildering. In 1830, the "Original Tally-Ho" was started, and in 1832, the "Real" and the "Patent Tally-Hoes." A picture by J. Pollard of the "Tally-Ho" and "Independent" nearing London on a summer afternoon, about 1828, shows that if one did actually start before the other, they both reached London together. The scene is the "Crown," Holloway Road, a house now numbered 622 in that thoroughfare, and rebuilt about 1865, but still bearing the same name, situated at the corner of Landseer Road.

In 1825 all previous efforts were eclipsed by the "Wonder" coach, between London and Shrewsbury, established in that year. It was the first to perform much over a hundred miles a day, and, starting from the "Bull and Mouth," St. Martin's-le-Grand, at 6.30 a.m., was in Shrewsbury, 154 miles distant, at 10.30 the same night. It aroused extraordinary competition. A

"TALLY-HO" AND "INDEPENDENT TALLY-HO," LONDON AND BIRMINGHAM COACHES, NEARING LONDON, 1828.
From a Print after J. Pollard.

"No Wonder," running three days a week from Birmingham lasted a season, and is heard of no more; but a more thoroughgoing rival was the "Nimrod," from Shrewsbury, put on the road in 1834. How the proprietors of the "Wonder" started the "Stag," and successfully "nursed" the "Nimrod," will be found recorded under Shrewsbury. There were at this competitive time more coaches on the Holyhead Road than on any other. So far as Barnet, there were eighteen mails and one hundred and seventy-six other coaches, besides road-waggons, post-chaises, and other vehicles. Some of them turned off at Hockliffe for Manchester and Liverpool, but the greater number continued to Birmingham. The London and Birmingham "Greyhound" was started in 1829, and ran light, with an imperial on the roof, to prevent luggage being placed there. Passengers' luggage must be sent to the office in time to be forwarded by the "Economist." So ran the notice. Both the "Greyhound" and the "Economist" were night coaches: the latter, the luggage-carrier, starting an hour earlier. It was at one time proposed to light the "Greyhound" with gas, but when it was found that the gas-tank would take up the space in the fore-boot wanted for parcels, the idea was relinquished. The down "Greyhound" was ingeniously robbed in March 1835 by a gang who set to work very cleverly. Two inside places were booked by the thieves at the "Swan with Two Necks," and the two remaining places at the "Angel," Islington.

When the coach reached Hockliffe, two of the confederates alighted, and the other two left at Stony Stratford. Nothing was discovered until Coventry was reached, when the guard, feeling about inside, found that one of the parcels gave way. On his leaning against it, away it went into the boot, which had been cut open, and a bank parcel, containing 300 sovereigns and a bill of exchange for £120 extracted. There is no record of the thieves ever having been discovered. They disappeared, just as did those who walked off with bank-notes to the value of £4002 from the Birmingham "Balloon Post Coach," when standing in the yard of the "Swan with Two Necks," December 12th, 1822. £1000 was offered for the discovery of the thieves, and the notes were stopped, but the results do not appear.

Horrified horse-owners, and old-fashioned persons with prejudices against invention and progress, raise outcries against the pace of motor-cars, and have succeeded in reducing the legal speed on roads from the original 14 miles an hour allowed by Act of Parliament to the 12 miles permitted by an order of the Local Government Board; but the pace attained toward the close of the coaching era by some of the crack coaches was much higher. The rival "Tally-Ho" and "Independent Tally-Ho" coaches, for instance, ran certain stages up to $18\frac{3}{4}$ miles an hour, and only on one stage did they drop down to 12 miles. "Furious driving," indeed, and vouched for by the contemporary *Coventry Chronicle*,

May 8th, 1830, which well heads its report, "Extraordinary Travelling":—

"Saturday se'night, being May-day, the usual competition took place between the London Coaches. The "Independent Tally-ho," running between Birmingham and London, performed a feat altogether unparalleled in the annals of Coaching, having travelled the distance of one-hundred-and-nine miles in seven hours and thirty-nine minutes.

"The following is a correct account of the time it took to perform the distance, horsed by the various proprietors:—Mr. Horne, from London to Colney, seventeen-and-quarter miles, in one-hour-and-six minutes;—Mr. Bowman, from Colney to Redbourne (where the passengers stopped six minutes for breakfast), seven-and-half miles, in twenty-six minutes;—Mr. Morris, from Redbourne to Hockliffe, twelve-and-quarter miles, in one-hour-and-four minutes;—Mr. Warden, from Hockliffe to Shenley, eleven miles, in forty-seven minutes;—Mr. May, from Shenley to Daventry, twenty-four miles, in one-hour-and-forty-nine minutes;—Mr. Garner, from Daventry to Coventry, nineteen-and-quarter miles, in one-hour-and-twelve minutes;—Mr. Radenhurst, from Coventry to Birmingham, seventeen-and-three quarter miles, in one-hour-and-fifteen minutes.

"The 'Original Tally-ho' performed the same distance in seven-hours-and-fifty minutes."

The extraordinary feat of the "Independent Tally-ho" recorded above, excelled the per-

formances of that famous coach, the "Quicksilver" Exeter mail; but that is nothing compared with the passengers' feat of swallowing a breakfast in the six minutes allowed for that meal at Redbourne. It is probably no great hazard to guess that those unhappy passengers had no breakfast at all on that historic occasion.

It is not to be supposed that coaching was an altogether safe method of travelling, especially when feats of this kind were indulged in; but it must be acknowledged that comparatively few of the accidents happened when racing. Among the disasters that now and again occurred, besides those recorded elsewhere in these pages, the following specimens, from October 1834 to the close of 1837, are typical:—

1834, October. — Shrewsbury "Union" overturned at Overley Hill, near Wellington. The coach was heavily laden and one of the hind wheels collapsed. One of the outsides, a Mr. Newey, of Halesowen, jumped off, but not far enough, and the coach and luggage fell on him, killing him. He died the next morning, at the Haygate inn.

,, "Nimrod." Coachman thrown off near Haygate, and killed on the spot.

,, Lichfield and Wolverhampton coach. A jockey, named Calloway, had his leg broken by being thrown off in an upset. In August 1835 he was awarded £210 damages.

1835, September. — "Emerald," London and Birmingham coach, upset at 2 a.m. near Little Brickhill, owing to axle-tree of near fore-wheel breaking. The five outsides were pitched into a hedge, and not seriously hurt, but the coachman, John Webb, was entangled with the apron, and was crushed to death by the coach falling on him. His body was found to be terribly mangled when carried into the "Peacock and Sandhill Tavern."

1836.—Sawyer, the beadle of Apothecaries' Hall, returning from Birmingham on outside of coach (name not specified) fell asleep. A jerk flung him off, and he was killed.

1837, August.—"Emerald," London and Birmingham coach. Horses dashed away up Plumb Park Hill, near Stony Stratford, and coach upset in the succeeding valley. Outside passengers thrown a distance of twenty feet, and two of them killed.

,, October.—Birmingham and Shrewsbury Mail upset on entering Wolverhampton, and coach smashed to pieces. All passengers severely injured.

,, December. — Holyhead Mail upset at Willenhall, owing to obstructions in the road during alterations. Coachman's skull fractured, and one outside

passenger injured. The "Swallow" coach had been upset on the same spot the day before.

Besides these instances, there was the sad case of Yates, a guard on the "Wonder," who at Christmas time, in one year not particularised, was thrown off the coach at Wolverhampton. The coach was overloaded with game and Christmas hampers, and he occupied a make-shift perch over one of the hind wheels. The vehicle gave a lurch, and he fell out; his feet catching in the straps, he was dragged some distance on his head until the hind wheel caught him and crushed his thigh. He died the next day.

The very names of the coaches that ran in the last years of the road breathe an air of competition. The old "Gee-hoes," "Caravans," and "Diligences"; the "Originals" and their like, made way for the "Prince Regent," "Royal Union," "Sovereign," and "John Bull"; and to them succeeded such suggestions of speed as the "Celerity," "Antelope," "Greyhound," "Express," "Rocket," and "Swallow." Moderate charges were hinted at in the names of the "Economist" and the "Liberal"; and a high courage, calculated to daunt opponents, in those of the "Triumph," "Retaliator," "Defiance," and "Tartar." The public largely benefited in those ultimate years by the competition, as also did the turnpike tolls; but it

may be doubted whether many coach-proprietors then made much profit. For one thing, a stage-coach running every day throughout the year on the road as far as Birmingham paid in tolls alone £3 11*s.* 9*d.* a day, in addition to the duty of a penny a mile paid by all coaches for every four passengers they were licensed to carry, irrespective of the places being occupied or not.

CLARK'S STEAM CARRIAGE, 1832. *From an Old Print.*

Turnpike gates encouraged Sabbatarian feeling by charging double on Sundays; so, on the assumption that a Birmingham coach ran 365 days in the year, it would have to pay something like £1400 in tolls alone, or to Holyhead £3400.

Long before railways seriously threatened to drive coaches off the road, the steam carriages of the early motor-car period entered into a

fleeting rivalry with horses. Of these, William Clark's steam carriage was the most notable. It was put upon the road between London and Birmingham in June 1832, and was a huge three-wheeled conveyance, carrying 50 passengers, 28 inside. Little is known of this conveyance beyond the claims made for it, which included the statements that it could develop 100 horse-power and that the pace could be regulated at pleasure from 1 to 50 miles an hour. Another contrivance of this kind was Heaton's steam carriage, of 1833, which is recorded to have made several journeys between Birmingham and Coventry, at a speed of 8 miles an hour, but soon faded into obscurity; probably crushed out of commercial existence by the extravagant tolls levied on all these mechanical inventions by road trustees, highly prejudiced against anything of the kind.

V

Such were the conditions of coaching when rumours of a projected London and Birmingham Railway began to be noised about in 1825, and then in 1830. "London and Birmingham" that railway was first named, although, if the original project be closely followed, it will be seen that not London, but Birmingham, took the initiative.

London has ever lagged in the rear. When the early Birmingham, Shrewsbury, and Chester coaches plied between those towns and the metropolis, it was not from London that they originated, but from the provinces; and, just in same way, it was the Birmingham merchants to whom the idea of a railway to London occurred, as not merely a cheaper and more expeditious way of travelling to the capital, but an excellent means by which goods might be conveyed, and London, as a great market for them, duly exploited. The original organising committee was eventually joined by a body of London bankers and financiers, and a line of country surveyed by George and Robert Stephenson in face of a most determined opposition offered by landowners on the way. Robert Stephenson has left an account of his difficulties, and stated that he walked the whole distance between London and Birmingham no fewer than twenty times. The long story of the fight in Parliament for the Bill in 1832, of its first defeat, and of its eventual success in 1833, is not a matter for these pages. Only let it be noted that the opposition of the landed proprietors was bought off by the addition of half a million sterling to the estimates for the purchase of land along the route.

How enormous was the road and canal traffic at that time may be judged from the statement prepared by the projectors of the railway, who put the sum paid annually for travelling and

conveyance of goods between London and Birmingham at £800,000.

The construction of the railway was begun in June, 1834. On July 20th, 1837, the first portion was opened to Boxmoor, a distance of 24½ miles, and on October 16th following to Tring. On April 9th, 1838, the railhead had reached a point just beyond Bletchley, and there it stopped for some months, owing to engineering difficulties at Roade and Kilsby. Meanwhile the works had been pushed on from the Birmingham end, and between that town and Rugby the line was complete. A temporary station, known as "Denbigh Hall," was provided near Bletchley, where the railway crossed the Holyhead Road, and between this and Rugby the 38 miles break in the line was traversed by a service of coaches until the following September, when the London and Birmingham Railway was opened along its entire length.

No one was more pleased at this than Dr. Arnold, the great Headmaster of Rugby School, whose attitude was in strong contrast with that generally adopted by the classes. "I rejoice to see it," he said, "and to think that feudality has gone for ever. It is so great a blessing to think that any one evil is really extinct."

This event, of course, sounded the death-knell of coaching along the first half of the Holyhead Road, but there were those who thought the railway must soon show its inability to beat a well-appointed coach, and so they held

on a little while longer, encouraged by some of the more irreconcileable among travellers. The "Greyhound" and the "Albion" were the last to go, in the early weeks of 1839, basely deserted even by those who had egged their proprietors to such foredoomed opposition. Edward Sherman, the great coach proprietor of the "Bull and Mouth," who had nine coaches on this road, was a fanatical opponent of railways, and struggled to the last against them, losing thereby the important carrying and van business of the London and Birmingham, secured by the far-seeing policy of Chaplin and Horne, of the "Swan with Two Necks," who abandoned coaching and threw in their interest with the new order of things. Sherman eventually saved himself by joining his interests with the Great Western Railway.

The opening of the London and Birmingham had a great effect upon the Irish mails and passenger traffic; for the Grand Junction Railway, between Birmingham and Liverpool, had already been in existence since July 1837, and thus a continuous route between London and Liverpool was available to Post Office and public, saving many hours and much expense. Both seized the opportunity, and everything went by train to the Lancashire port. It seemed as though not only the Holyhead Road but Holyhead itself was a thing of the past.

In 1846 the London and Birmingham and the Grand Junction Railways amalgamated, under

the title of the London and North-Western Railway, and the Liverpool route might thus have been thought settled for all time; but in the meanwhile two separate lines had been authorised—one from Crewe to Chester, and another from Chester to Holyhead. By the completion of the second of these (in March 1850) Holyhead was brought back to its old importance, and is once more on the mail route between London and Dublin. Alterations on the main line have long since left Birmingham on one side, and the "Wild Irishman" now goes from Rugby by way of Nuneaton and Tamworth to Stafford, Crewe, and Chester.

VI

The Holyhead and the Great North Roads are identical as far as Barnet, and the first landmark on the way is the "Angel." Every one knows the "Angel," Islington. It is a great deal more than a public-house, and has attained the dignity of a geographical expression. Any teetotaller can afford to know the "Angel," and the acquaintance is no more a stigma than an intimacy with the English Channel or the North Foreland. Five roads meet at this spot—for seventy years or so the meeting and starting point of omnibuses to and from all parts of

North London. Nothing strikes the foreigner with greater astonishment than that our omnibus routes start from or end at some public-house, and that the "Angel," the "Elephant and Castle," the "Eyre Arms," and the "Horns," should be household names in different parts of London. The intelligent foreigner goes away and writes scathingly upon what he considers an evidence of drunkenness rampant in all classes of English society, and does not stop to enquire the origin of the custom, to be found far back in omnibus history, when many public-houses had convenient stables, and omnibus proprietors had none.

The "Angel" is not in Islington at all, but just within the parish of Clerkenwell. How it came to be just inside the Clerkenwell boundary is told in the legend of a pauper being found dead in what was then called Back Road, now the Liverpool Road, at that time in the great parish of St. Mary, Islington (which by the way, is the largest and most populous parish in England, numbering over 350,000 souls), but now, with the "Angel" in that of St. John's, Clerkenwell. Islington refused to bury the pauper and Clerkenwell performed that duty, afterwards claiming the land.

The modern "Angel," built somewhere about 1870, before public-houses became Elizabethan, Jacobean, or Queen Annean, is frankly a public-house in appearance, like the rebuilt "Elephant and Castle" and others, and carries in its aspect

no reminiscence of coaching times. It has been left for the proprietors in recent years to grow somewhat ashamed of that fact, for, painted on tiles, there now appears on the wall of its entrance lobby one of those quasi-historical pictures, that have of late begun to decorate the entrance walls of our otherwise unredeemed gin palaces. By means of these tile-pictures those patrons who are not too far gone in intoxication may learn something of local or national history and topography. In the case of the "Angel," the subject selected is that of the starting of the Holyhead Mail from the old house, whose frontage, pictured from old prints, bears the inscription, "For Gentlemen and Families," and at whose windows the gentlemen and families are accordingly observed to be sitting, enjoying the scene. It is not conceivable that any one should now hope to find pleasure in doing the like at these modern windows that nowadays light billiard-rooms, and look down upon a busy scene of omnibuses and tram-cars; but perhaps even what we rightly consider to be a sordid confluence of traffic may come to have a retrospective romance of its own in, say, the twenty-first century. Exactly what the "Angel" was like in 1812 may be seen from the accompanying illustration by Pollard, of the illuminations on the night of the King's birthday in that year. The Holyhead Mail is prominent in front of two others drawn up before the house.

THE "ANGEL," ISLINGTON. MAIL COACHES AND ILLUMINATIONS ON NIGHT OF THE KING'S BIRTHDAY, 1812.

From a Print after J. Pollard.

A few paces north stood the at one time equally famous "Peacock," and the not altogether obscure "White Lion"; coaching inns both, but long since rebuilt as mere "publics." "All coaches going anywhere north called at the 'Peacock,'" says Colonel Birch-Reynardson. "As they came up, the old hostler, or a man, whoever he was, called out their names as they arrived on the scene. Up they come through the fog, but our old friend knows them all. Now 'York Highflier,' now 'Leeds Union,' now 'York Express,' now 'Rockingham,' now 'Stamford Regent,' now 'Truth and Daylight,' and others which I forget, all with their lamps lit, and all smoking and steaming, so that you could hardly see the horses. Off they go. One by one as they get their vacant places filled up, the guard on one playing 'Off she goes!' on another, 'Oh, dear, what can the matter be?' on another, 'When from great Londonderry'; on another, 'The flaxen-headed ploughboy'; in fact, all playing different tunes almost at the same time. The coaches rattling over the stones, or rather pavement—for there was little or no macadam in those days; the horses' feet clattering along to the sound of the merry-keyed bugles, upon which many of the guards played remarkably well, altogether made such a noise as could be heard nowhere except at the 'Peacock' at Islington, at half-past six in the morning. All this it was curious to hear and see, though not over pleasant in a dense fog, particularly if it

were very cold into the bargain, with heavy rain or snow falling."

Half-past six in the morning! Yes; but that was not by any means an early hour in coaching days. If we turn to *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, we shall find that Tom, with his father, come to see him off to Rugby by the "Tally-Ho," stayed at the "Peacock" overnight, to make sure of catching that conveyance, and that in order to do so they were actually up and breakfasting at ten minutes to three on a winter's morning. And none too early, either; for just as Tom was swallowing the last mouthful of breakfast, winding his comforter round his throat, and tucking the ends into the breast of his overcoat, the horn sounded, Boots looked in, with the fateful cry of "Tally-Ho, sir," and the "Tally-Ho" itself appeared on the instant outside. But what "Tally-Ho" this could have been that passed through Rugby does not appear. "Tell the young gent to look alive," said the guard; "now then sir, jump up behind," and they were off. "Good-bye, father—my love at home"; and the coach whirls away in the darkness.

London then ended at Islington. Where does it now end? At Highgate; at Whetstone, where the boundary of the Metropolitan Postal District is crossed; or beyond South Mimms, where the frontiers of the Metropolitan Police march with those of the Hertfordshire Constabulary? Highgate Archway was wont to be regarded

THE HIGHGATE ARCHWAY FROM THE TURNPIKE GATE AT HOLLOWAY.

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as the northern gate into London, and may now be taken as dividing the far suburbs and the near. Seventy years ago it was quite rural.

VII

It is curious to look upon an old print like that of the Archway road and its toll-gate, reproduced here, and then, with a knowledge of that busy spot, with its thronging omnibuses and tramcars, to compare the old view with the present-day aspect of the place. An Archway Tavern is seen standing at the junction of the roads, but it is quite unlike the flaunting gin-palace of to-day. What, also, has become of the horse and cattle pond in front? The toll-gate, we know, finally disappeared in 1876, but long before then the ascending roadway had been lined with buildings on either side. Only recently the old and ugly archway has been removed, to make way for the new and handsome iron and steel viaduct, which bears the misleading date of 1897, although the structure was not opened until the summer of 1900. It may be as well to put upon record that it is situated a hundred yards to the north of where the old Archway stood. Of late years, since the government of London has been taken over by the London County Council, the Archway has been

more than ever a landmark, showing to where the frontier of London extended, for the London County Council's boundary ran half-way through the structure, whose northern moiety lay within the territory of the Middlesex Council.

The new viaduct, wholly in Middlesex, cost £25,000. Its date, "1897," prominent in cast iron on the southern approach, together with

THE NEW HIGHGATE ARCHWAY.

the fact that the work was not completed until midway through 1900, perpetuates the sinister memory of the great engineering strike in progress during that interval. Five authorities —the London County Council, the Middlesex County Council, the Islington Vestry, Hornsey District Council, and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners (who are administrators of the Bishop

of London's estates here)—contributed in varying proportions to the cost. They may look with satisfaction at the result: a light and handsome bridge, that, vaulting across the roadway with a clear flight of three times the span of the old arch, renders it possible to widen the road to any conceivable width, against that time which Mother Shipton foresaw, when "England shall be undone and Highgate Hill stand in the middle of London."

Let us look back, on passing beneath this triumph of engineering skill, and, seeing with what grace the huddled mass of London is framed by it, conceive the welcome it may seem to extend to the wayfarer (if such there be) coming to the capital to seek his fortunes. It may, however, be readily supposed that the days when ambitious youth resorting by road to London, there to win fortune with the customary half-crown, are done. The roads nowadays have lost all possibilities of that endearing romance of high ambition and courage, coupled with slender resources and an uninstructed belief that London's streets are paved with gold. The precociously worldly-wise youngsters of to-day, who resort to the Metropolis by rail, have no such illusions.

On the fortune-seekers of old, who tramped the weary miles to this gateway of their ambition, the forbidding old Archway must needs have exercised a dispiriting influence. It looked, from its outer side, so like a fortress gate, and

was alas! too often a prison-gate when once within. London, lying down below them, vast and unknown; how, they might have thought, would it be possible to conquer *that*; to win a place *there*? Little blame to such of them as may have trembled at the prospect and retraced their steps; and better perhaps had it been for many of those who went forward that their courage had thus failed them at the threshold; rather than that they had gone down into that human whirlpool, to return broken in after days, to leap to death from the footpath above the lofty arch, into that roadway they had trod so hopefully years before.

For old Highgate Archway was a veritable Bridge of Sighs; a favourite resort of London suicides to whom a leap from Waterloo Bridge into the river did not offer great attractions. It was not until the Archway was opened toll-free that the iron railings fencing the upper roadway were erected. They were 7 feet in height, cost £700, and were the cause of great disappointment to would-be suicides by leaping, who have an illogical objection to falling one yard more than necessary for the purpose of breaking their necks. This explains the comparative disfavour with which suicides regard the Golden Gallery of St. Paul's Cathedral and other high places.

It remains uncertain whether those protective railings were erected for the sake of the suicides, or for that of the increased number of persons who used the Archway Road when tolls were

HIGHGATE ARCHWAY: MAIL COACH NEARING LONDON.

From a Print after J. Pollard.

abolished, some of whom might have been injured by those too anxious to shuffle off their mortal coil, to first ascertain whether or not the road was clear. Certain, however, it is that it mattered very much to the local authorities from which side the suicides came down: the territory of the Islington Vestry having been on one side and that of the Hornsey Local Board on the other. It is even related that one authority proposing to the other that railings should be erected, and meeting with a refusal to share the cost, fenced in its own side and thus left the self-murderers no choice. The expense and trouble of the necessary inquests falling on the other authority speedily brought about the railing-in of that side also.

VIII

The roadway of Highgate Archway is on a level with the cross upon the dome of St. Paul's. From what the perfervid preachers of our own time—the Solomon Eagles of our day—call that "sink of iniquity," the voice of London, inarticulate, like the growl of a fierce beast, rises continually, save for some sleepy hours between midnight and the dawn. Frank Osbaldistone, in *Rob Roy*, journeying north, heard the hum of London die away on his ear when he

reached Highgate, the distant peal of her steeples sounding their admonitory "turn again," just as they did to Whittington. Looking back from the Hill upon the dusky magnificence of the Metropolis, he felt as if he were leaving behind comfort, opulence, the charms of society, and all pleasures of cultivated life. The modern wayfarer is not so easily rid of the Great City, whose low-pitched roar not only follows him to these northern heights, but pursues him, clamant, onwards through Finchley, and whose rising tide of houses now laps the crest of Highgate Hill and spills over the brim, in driblets of new suburban streets, like a brick- and mortar Deluge.

Just half a mile past the Archway, which of old was the *ultima thule*, the Hercules Pillars of London in this direction, still stands the "Woodman," inn, pictured in the coaching print of the thirties, shown over page. It is the original building that still stands here, but carved and cut about and greatly altered, and stands converted into an ordinary public-house. The curious little summer-house, or look-out, remains, little changed, but no visitors ascend to it to admire the view with telescopes, as we see them doing in the picture; for the spreading hill and dale towards London are covered with houses—objects not so rare in the neighbourhood of London that one needs to seek them with a spy-glass.

Southwood Lane, opposite this old inn, leads

THE "WOODMAN," FINCHLEY, 1834: COVENTRY AND BIRMINGHAM COACH PASSING.

From a Print after J. Pollard.

across from this branch of the high road to Highgate village, which should be noticed before the modern spirit seizes upon and transforms it.

When Highgate Archway and the Archway Road were completed, in 1813, and traffic, notwithstanding the heavy tolls, began to come and go this way, Highgate village was ruined. Few cared to painfully toil up Highgate Hill and go through the once busy village down the corresponding descent of North Hill. Ever since then, while the suburbs round about have grown, Highgate village has gradually decayed. Little alteration has been made here in the broad street—empty now, that was once so busy—and Highgate remains preserved like a fly in amber, testifying to the old-world appearance of a typical coaching village near London. True it is that its fine old houses are a thought shabby, while the "Red Lion," though still standing, has long been closed, and its elaborate sign-post innocent these many years of its swinging sign. The "Gatehouse Tavern," too, was rebuilt in 1896; but, for the rest, Highgate is the Highgate of old.

"Established over five hundred years" was the legend displayed by the old "Gatehouse Tavern" pictured here. Many old clubs held high revel in it—literary clubs and others making their several ostensible objects the excuse for holding high revel. *Punch* itself was founded in a pot-house. Among the clubs

that foregathered here were the "Ash Sticks," the "Aged Pilgrims," and the "Ben Jonson"; while in the old low-ceilinged rooms the Sunday ordinary that was long a favourite institution, combined with some deservedly renowned port, attracted George Cruickshank (before he found grace and became a total abstainer) and his brother Robert; Archibald Hemming, *Punch's* first cartoonist; and many an Early Victorian.

The steep descent of North Hill brings the explorer from old Highgate to East Finchley, where a modern suburb struggles bravely, but with indifferent success, to live down the depressing circumstance of being set in midst of some half-dozen huge cemeteries, and on a road along which every day and all day a continual stream of funeral processions passes dismally along. The chief gainer from this traffic appears to be the "Old White Lion," where the mourners halt and refresh on their return. Mourning should seem, judging from the assemblage outside the "Old White Lion" (which should surely, in complimentary mourning, be the "Old *Black* Lion"), to be a thirsty business.

Beyond the cemeteries lies Brown's Wells, in midst of what was once Finchley Common. At Brown's Wells, if anywhere, memories of that ill-omened waste should be most easily recalled; for here, beside the road, in the grounds of Hilton House, stands the massive trunk of "Turpin's Oak," still putting forth leaves with every recurrent spring. Did the conscience-

HIGHGATE VILLAGE, 1826. *From an Old Print.*

stricken spirits of the dead revisit the scenes of their crimes, then the garden of Hilton House might well be peopled o' nights with remorseful spooks; for many another beside Turpin lurked here and snatched purses, or held up coaches and horsemen crossing this one-time lonely waste.

Pennant, the antiquary, writing at the close of the eighteenth century, talks of the great Common not as an antiquity but as a place he was perfectly well acquainted with, travelling as he did the Holyhead Road between Chester and London. "Infamous for robberies," he calls it, "and often planted with gibbets, the penalty of murderers."

This aspect of Finchley Common was then no new thing, and if Pennant had been minded to write an antiquarian exercise on its evil associations, he would have found much material to his hand. But the most sinister period of the Common's unsavoury history began at the close of the long struggle between King and Parliament in the mid-seventeenth century, and for long years afterwards robbery and murder were to be feared by travellers in these wilds.

William Cady was early among the highwaymen who made this a place of dread. His was a short and bloody career of four years on the King's highway, ending in 1687, when he was hanged at Tyburn for the last of his exploits, the murder of a groom on this then lonely expanse. He had overtaken a lady riding for the benefit of the air, and, ignoring the groom,

tore the diamond ring from her finger, snatched a gold watch from her pocket, and, threatening her with a pistol, secured a purse containing eighty guineas. The groom, unarmed, could do nothing but abuse the highwayman, who shot him dead with two bullets through the brain and was just about making off when two gentlemen rode up with pistols in their hands. Cady at once opened fire on them, and a lively pistolling began, ending with the highwayman's horse being shot and himself seized and bound, and in due course taken to Newgate, whence he only emerged for that last ride to Tyburn, which was the usual ending of his kind. He did not make an edifying exit but cursed, drank, and scoffed to the last, dying with profanity on his lips, at the early age of twenty-five.

From the unrelieved vulgarity and brutality of Cady's exploit it is a relief to turn to that of a man of humour. Would that we knew his name, so that it might be ranged with those of Du Vall and Captain Hind, themselves spiced with an airy wit that occasionally eased the loss of a watch or a purse to those suddenly bereft of them. This unknown worthy, whose exploit is recorded in a contemporary newspaper, was a humorist, if ever there was one. It was one evening in 1732, when he was patrolling the Common, that a chariot and four horses approached from the direction of London. Hopeful of a rich quarry, he spurred up and thrust a pistol through the carriage window, demanding

money and jewellery. Now, unhappily for the highwayman's hope of plunder, this was the carriage of a Yorkshire squire returning home without him, and the person sitting within was but a countryman to whom the coachman had given a lift.

"I am very poor," exclaimed the rustic, terrified at sight of the pistol, "but here are two shillings; all I have got in the world."

Cady, doubtless, in his disappointment, would have shot the yokel; but this was a "highway lawyer" of a different stamp. "Poor devil!" said that true Knight of the Road, withdrawing his pistol and waving the proffered money aside; "here, take a shilling and drink my health!" And so, tossing him a coin, he disappeared.

For accounts of other happenings upon this sombre Common, let the curious refer to the pages of the GREAT NORTH ROAD, where they will be found, duly set forth.

Not until the first few years of the nineteenth century had passed was the place safe. It was an Alsatia wherein the most craven of footpads might rob with impunity. Strange to say, there were those who did not think it right to shoot highwaymen, and many of those who did so, lost their nerve at the supreme moment and fired wildly into space. The robbers' risks were therefore not overwhelming. Dr. Johnson was undecided about this matter of right, as we learn from one of those semi-philosophical dis-

cussions into which Boswell led him; discussions the indefatigable "Bozzy" has recorded at length. Three of them—Johnson, Boswell, and Taylor—were disputing the question. "For myself," said Taylor, "I would rather be robbed than shoot highwaymen." Johnson—perhaps because he generally took the opposite view, from "cussedness" or a love of disputation—argued that he would rather shoot the man on the instant of his attempt than afterwards give such evidence against him as would result in his execution. "I may be mistaken," said the great man, "as to him when I swear; I cannot be mistaken if I shoot him in the act. Besides, we feel less reluctance to take away a man's life when we are heated by the injury, than to do it at a distance of time by an oath after we have cooled."

This seemed to Boswell rather as acting from the motive of private vengeance than of public advantage; but Johnson maintained that in acting thus he would be satisfying both. He added, however, that it was a difficult point: "one does not know what to say: one may hang one's self a year afterwards from uneasiness for having shot a highwayman. Few minds are to be trusted with so great a thing." And we may add, seeing how many highwaymen were shot at, and how few hit, few hands either.

Half a mile beyond Turpin's Oak is North Finchley, a recent suburb of smart shops, risen on the site of those gibbets mentioned by

Pennant. Those who affect to be more genteel and individualistic, name it Torrington Park, and thus hope to be exquisitely distinguished from the ruck of Finchleys that take their names from the four points of the compass. The Park Road Hotel, rising at the angle where the road from Child's Hill joins the highway we are travelling, actually stands on the site of a gibbet. As "Tally-ho Corner," this is a spot familiarly known to cyclists. Maps, however, know it as "Tallow Corner."

Whetstone succeeds to North Finchley. It once groaned under the oppression of a toll-gate—a gate that spanned the road by the "Griffin" inn, where the old "whetstone" still remains. This gate, abolished November 1st, 1863, was associated with a story of George Morland, the artist, who, having received an invitation to Barnet, was journeying to that town in company with two friends, when he was stopped here by a cart containing two men, who were disputing with the toll-keeper. One was a chimney-sweep, and the other one Hooper, a tinsmith and prize-fighter, scarcely higher in the social scale; but they knew Morland, who had often caroused with them at the low way-side taverns he affected. Now, however, he was not in a mood for his old companions; recent success had turned him respectable for a time. Accordingly, he endeavoured to pass, when the tinsmith called out, "What, Mr. Morland, won't you speak to a body?"

It was of no use trying to escape, for the man began to roar out after him, so that he was obliged to turn back and shake hands with his old crony; whereupon Hooper turned to the chimney-sweep and said, "Why, Dick, don't you know this here gentleman? 'Tis my friend, Mr. Morland." The man of soot, smiling a recognition, forced his unwelcome black hand upon his brother of the brush; then they whipped the horse up and went off, much to Morland's relief. He used afterwards to declare that the sweep was a stranger to him; but the dissolute artist's habits made the story generally believed, and "Sweeps, your honour," was a joke that followed him all his days.

IX

Barnet lies two miles ahead, crowning a ridge. Between this point and that town the road goes sharply down Prickler's Hill, and, passing under a railway bridge, climbs upwards again, along an embanked road that, steep though it be, takes the place of a very much steeper roadway. It was constructed between 1823 and 1827, as a part of the general remodelling of the Holyhead Road. The deserted old way, now leading nowhither, may be seen meandering off to the left, immediately past the railway bridge, down in the

THE OLD ROAD, BARNET.

hollow. Passing the "Old Red Lion" and a row of old houses that, fallen from their importance in facing the high road, look dejectedly across one-half of the Fair Ground, it comes to an end at the last house, whose projecting bay proclaims it to have once been a toll-house.

Barnet is famous for two things: for its Battle and for its Fair. The Battle is a thing of the dim and distant past: the Fair belongs to the present—the poignant present, as you think who venture within ear-shot of its Michaelmas hurly-burly, what time the horse-copers are rending the air with raucous cries, steam-organs bellowing, and, in fact, "all the fun of the Fair" in progress. It is, according to your taste and to the condition of your nerves, a pleasure or a martyrdom to be present at the great Fair of Barnet: that three days' Pandemonium to which come all the lowest of the low, whom, paradoxically enough, that "noble animal, the friend of man," attracts to himself. For Barnet is, above all other things, a Horse Fair. For love of the Horse, and with the hope of selling horses—and incidentally swindling the purchasers of them—such widely different characters as the horsey East-ender, the sly and crafty Welshman, the blarneying Irishman, and Sandy from Scotland, come greater or smaller distances with droves of cart-horses, cobs, hunters, and, in fact, every known variety of the Noble Animal; and to this nucleus of a Fair innumerable other trades attach themselves, like parasites. Barnet

Fair dates back to the time of Henry II. It is, therefore, of a very respectable antiquity. This antiquity is, indeed, the only respectable thing left to it. The rest is riot; and if the Barnet people had their will, there is little doubt that it would, in common with many other fairs, be abolished. When originally established, by Royal Charter, it lasted three weeks. From three weeks it was successively whittled down, in course of time, to sixteen days, and then to three days. From it, in other times, the Lord of the Manor, the Earl of Strafford, derived a splendid revenue; for his tolls, rigorously exacted by his stewards, were eightpence for every bull or stallion entering the Fair; fourpence for every horse, ass, or mule; and for every cow or calf, twopence.

The Fair Ground extends to either side of the long embankment, on whose steep slope the high road is carried up into Barnet Town; but the chief part of it centres around High Barnet station, on the right hand. The Fair begins on the first Monday in September, but at least a week before that date Barnet town and the roads leading into it, usually so quiet, are thronged with droves of horses and herds of cattle, and with the caravans of the showmen who hope to "make a good thing" out of the thousands of visitors to the Fair. Whatever private residents in Barnet may think of it, and however much they would like to see it abolished, its lasting success is assured as a popular holiday for certain classes of Londoners. The typical 'Arry

of Hendon or of Epping would no more think of not visiting Barnet Fair than he would think of abstaining from deep drinking when he reached the place. For, now that all other fairs within reach of London have been suppressed, this is pre-eminently the Cockney's outing. To deprive him of it would savour not a little of cruelty: it would certainly cut off from the travelling showmen and the proprietors of the giddy steam roundabouts a goodly portion of their incomes, while the pickpockets would miss one of the greatest chances in the year.

Let those who know of fairs only from idyllic descriptions of such things in the England of long ago, visit this of Barnet. Nothing in it is poetic, unless indeed the language common to those who attend upon the Noble Animal may be so considered; and certainly that is full of imagery, of sorts. It is wonderful what a power of debauching mankind the Horse possesses. Your ordinary cattle-drover is no saint, but he is a Bayard and a carpet-knight beside these fellows with straws in their mouths, and novel and vivid language on their tongues.

Here, as side-shows away from the horses, are the boxing-booths, the swings, and the trumpet-tongued merry-go-rounds, roaring like Bulls of Bashan and glittering with Dutch metal and cheap mirrors like Haroun-al-Raschid's palace just come out of pawn and much the worse for wear. Ladies clad in

purple velvet dresses, and with a yard and a half of ostrich feather in their hats patronise these delights; and lunch oleaginously on the fried fish cooking on a stall near by (which by the way, you may scent a quarter of a mile off). For those with nicer tastes, an itinerant confectioner makes sweets on the spot. For those who are sportively inclined there are several methods of dissipating their money: by shooting at bottles; shying at cocoanuts (all warranted milky ones) or by guessing under which of three thimbles temporarily resides the elusive pea. The furtive and nervous young man who presides over this show is more than itinerant. Ghostlike, he flits from group to group, harangues them with a phenomenal glibness and swiftness: discloses the pea under the *other* thimble; takes his gains, and so departs: the tail of his eye seeking, and hoping not to find, any one who may chance to be a detective. An ancient—a million times exposed—fraud, and still a very remunerative one!

For the rest, a very vulgar and disheartening show to those who preach culture to whom the cultured term "the masses." How to leaven the lump in that direction when you find it obstinately set upon such gross things of earth as penny shows, including six-legged calves and realistic scenes of the latest murders? Sons of Belial, indeed, are those who find delight herein: and many are they who do so take their pleasure.

X

On the crest of the steep ascent we come to Barnet, crowning its "monticulus, or little hill," as the county historian has it. With the town we have already made some acquaintance, in the pages of the "Great North Road."

It stands too well within the suburban radius of London for it to escape modern influences, and although, as Dickens said, in *Oliver Twist*, every other house was a tavern, inns are fewer nowadays and shops more numerous; and many of the surviving inns have been rebuilt. The original "Green Man," a very much larger and altogether more important house than the existing one, is no more. Sir Robert Peel—the great Sir Robert, statesman and originator of "Peelers"—often stayed there from Saturday to Monday, and it was beneath its roof that Lord Palmerston received the news of his succession to the title. The "Mitre," one of the most important of Barnet's inns at the close of the seventeenth century, has wholly disappeared, and the little house of that name, at the London end of the town, does but stand on a very small portion of its site; the rest of the ground being occupied by a large and exceedingly hideous building belonging to a firm of grocers. The disappearance of the "Mitre" is the more to be regretted, because it was a house of historic importance, General

Monk, on his march up to London in 1660, having rested there, while his army encamped about the town. The country was tired of the Commonwealth, and Monk at the head of 14,000 men, was master of the situation. No one knew his intentions. Appointed by Parliament, and yet with a commission from the King in his pocket, his advance from the north was the cause of the liveliest hopes and apprehensions to both sides. Accompanying him were two "Councellors of State and Abjurers of the King's Family," a worthy pair named Scot and Robinson, who were really acting as the spies of the Parliament. Staying with him at the "Mitre," they secured a room adjoining his, and either found or made a hole in the wainscot, to see and hear anything that might pass. The imagination readily pictures them peeping through the chinks and the secretive Monk, probably well aware of their doings, smiling as he undressed and went to bed. How he marched to London and thence, declaring for Charles II., to Dover, belongs to other than local history.

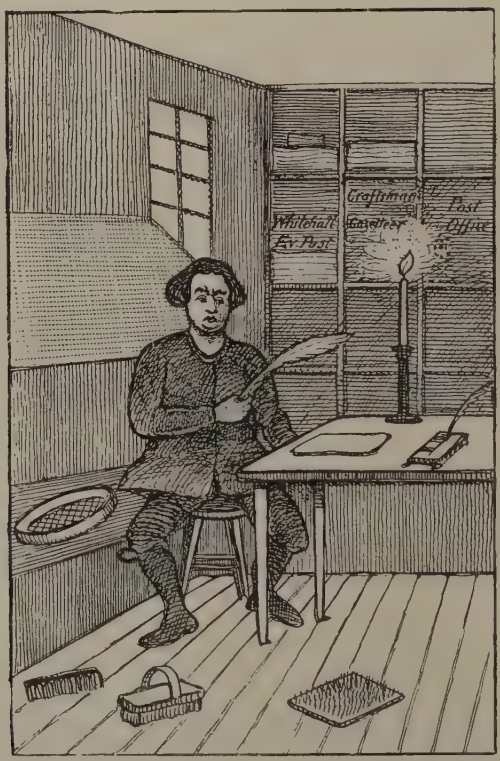
The "Red Lion" remains the most prominent house. What has rightly been called a "ghastly story" is that told of it in coaching days. An officer and his daughter, on their way to London to attend a funeral, only succeeded after a great deal of trouble in obtaining accommodation here. On retiring to her room, the young lady chanced to turn the handle of

a cupboard, when to her horror the door burst open and a corpse toppled out, almost felling her to the floor. The "accommodation" had been made by hastily removing the body from the bed and placing it where it would not have been found, except for that feminine mingled curiosity and precautionary sense which impels our womenkind to peer agitatedly under every bed, to leave no cupboard unexplored, and no drawer not scrutinised.

This Bluebeard kind of a story was long a current anecdote in the posting days, and implicitly believed. It is probably safe to assume that it did the business of the "Red Lion" enormous damage, and that those travellers who subsequently stayed there approached all cupboards with dread.

The "Red Lion" possessed a queer character in the person of its ostler, James Ripley, who in 1781 published a little book of *Select Letters on Various Subjects*. On the title-page he states that he was then, and had been "for thirty years past," ostler, and in his dedication to "the Hon. Col. Blaithwate and the rest of the officers of the Royal Regiment of Horse Guards Blue," after saying that this dedication is "a grateful acknowledgement for the generous treatment always received for his unmerited services in the stable," proceeds to grovel in the most abject manner. "I shall always esteem it an honour," says he, "to rub down your horses' heels, so long as I am able to stoop to my feet."

This remarkable person, if we may judge from the curious frontispiece to his *Select Letters*, appears to have doubled the parts of ostler at the "Red Lion" and Postmaster of



JAMES RIPLEY, OSTLER OF THE "RED LION."

Barnet; while he would also seem to have embarked in the newspaper trade, according to the little heaps of papers seen in the pigeon-holes in the background, labelled "Whitehall Evening Post," "Craftsman," and "Gazetteer."

Here we perceive him, apparently inditing his *Letters*; a man with a decidedly Johnsonian cast of features, and clad in what looks more like a cast-off suit of an old Tower of London headsman than an ostler's everyday clothes. He is evidently at a loss for a word, or is perhaps (and rightly) surprised at the gigantic size of his quill, plucked from an ostrich, at the very least of it. A sieve, a curry-comb, and other articles of stable equipment, lie beside him, or are more or less artistically displayed in the foreground. If it were not for the title, we might almost suppose this to be a representation of some notorious criminal writing his last dying speech and confession in the condemned hold of Newgate. The picture appears to have been drawn from several points of view at once, productive of results more curious than pleasing to professors of perspective drawing.

Mr. James Ripley's letters range from scathing denunciations of postboys and advice to gentlemen how to treat such rascals, to the humane treatment of horses, the construction of stage waggons, and the villainous practice of writing more or less offensive remarks on window-panes. We are, in fact, after perusing his improving literature, led to the belief that he missed his vocation and ought to have been a clergyman of evangelistic views, instead of an ostler. But to let him speak for himself:—

"I can justly say that I am no mercenary writer, and that all my views are centred in

reforming the vices, follies, and errors of this depraved age. At present I shall confine myself to those nimble-fingered Gentlemen who leave specimens of their wit or folly, in trying the goodness of their diamonds upon the glass windows of every place they visit, or lodge at; curiosity often draws the fair sex to the window in expectation of meeting with some innocent piece of wit, or quotation from some eminent author; but how cruel the disappointment when she finds some indecent allusion, or downright obscenity."

Thus the ostler-moralist of the "Red Lion." What added terrors the roads would have acquired for giddy travellers had there been others like him!

Among other inns is the "Old Salisbury," familiarly known to cyclists of northern clubs as the "Old Sal." It was originally a drovers' and teamsters' house, and called the "Royal Wagon." Many years ago, when the grasping proprietors of the "Green Man" and the "Red Lion" charged 1*s.* 6*d.* a mile for posting, the Lord Salisbury of that day, being a frugal man, transferred his custom here and saved 3*d.* a mile. Pepper, the then landlord, at once changed his sign to its present style.

XI

THE modern Holyhead Road, made in the Twenties is seen midway in Barnet, branching off to the left by what remains of the once-famous "Green Man." Broad and well-engineered though it be, it has little of interest in the three miles between here and South Mimms; its sole features, indeed, being a fine view of Wrotham Park, to the right, and a glimpse of the gateway of Dyrham Park, on the left. It can scarce be said that that heavy stone entrance—a classic arch flanked by Tuscan columns—is beautiful, but it has an interest all its own, for it was originally the triumphal arch erected in 1660 in London Streets, to celebrate the "joyfull Restoracion" of Charles II.

Taking then, by preference, the old road, the way lies across Hadley Green, where, among the ragged fir-trees that are scattered on its western side, stand the remains of the old stocks. The stone obelisk, famous in all the country round about as "Hadley Highstone," is presently seen ahead, at a parting of the ways. To the right hand goes the Great North Road: to the left the old road to Holyhead. "Eight miles to St. Albans" is the legend on the hither face of the monument, whose other inscription we halt to read:—

"Here was fought the Famous Battle between Edward the Fourth and the Earl of

Warwick, April 14, Anno 1471, In which the Earl was defeated And Slain. Stick no Bills."

Musing sadly on that unromantic injunction, modern, but deeply carved, like the rest of the inscription, in the stone, we prepare to depart, when one, who is probably the "oldest inhabitant," approaches and volunteers the information that the obelisk was formerly some thirty-two yards

HADLEY GREEN: WINTER.

forward, and opposite the inn called the "Two Brewers." In 1842, it seems, it was removed to its present position.

Leaving this elevated plateau, which Hall, the old chronicler, treating of the Battle of Barnet, calls "a fair place for two armies to join together"—as though that were the chief use for a plain—the old road begins its three miles of fall and rise; down into pebbly dips

and over hunchbacked little rustic bridges spanning wandering watercourses; up steep rises and swerving round sharp corners, alternately from left to right; by the forgotten hamlet of Kitt's End, down Dancer's Hill, and past the suggestively named Mimms Wash, where the old coachmen, when the waters were out in winter-time (as they generally were, at this plashy corner) usually drove into the ditch, which, concealed by the floods that already covered the road and rose to the axle-trees, held a dangerous depth of water.

This old road, in fact, and indeed the whole of the eight miles between Barnet and St. Albans, pulses with stirring incidents of the old coaching days. It was, for example, in 1820 that what was described as an "accident" to the Holyhead Mail took place a mile short of St. Albans. As a matter of plain fact, it was not so much an accident as the almost inevitable conclusion of a road race between the Holyhead and the Chester Mails. The coachmen had been driving furiously all the way from Highgate, and striving to pass one another. Through Barnet they clattered, and by some miracle avoiding a smash on the old road, came at last within sight of St. Albans, to where the Old Mile House still stands by the way. Here, with an inch or two to spare, the coachman of the Holyhead Mail took the off side and was coming past the Chester Mail, when the coachman pulled his horses across the road. In

the collision that followed, both coaches were overturned, and one passenger, William Hunt by name, killed. At the inquest held at the "Peahen," St. Albans, both coachmen were, very properly, found guilty of manslaughter, and were committed for trial at the next Hertford sessions, which did not open till six months later. During the whole of that period they were kept in irons at St. Albans. Eventually they received a further term of twelve months imprisonment each.

With happenings such as these, becoming more alarmingly frequent as the pace of coaches and the rivalry between them increased, travelling grew exceedingly dangerous, and Lord Erskine, when counsel for a person who had had the misfortune to be thrown off one of the coaches from the "Swan with Two Necks," and to receive a broken arm, was not altogether unduly severe in his witty address to the jury:—

"Gentlemen of the jury," he gravely began, "the plaintiff in this case is Mr. Beverley, a respectable merchant of Liverpool, and the defendant is Mr. Chaplin, proprietor of the 'Swan with Two Necks,' in Lad Lane,—a sign emblematical, I suppose, of the number of necks people ought to possess who ride in his vehicles."

A further development of coaching dangers about 1820 was found in the growing mania of the young bloods of that day for driving

honours. Every young man about town cherished an ambition to become an expert coachman, but unhappily they took their lessons, not on the box-seats of empty coaches, but laid inexperienced hands upon the reins of well-filled conveyances.

This driving ambition was a fine thing for the sportively inclined, but staid and elderly persons were apt to be greatly terrified by it. An "Old Traveller," writing to the *Sporting Magazine* in 1822, after having read the coaching articles by "Nimrod," asks the Editor if he will have the goodness to request his distinguished contributor to inform the travelling public how they are to travel fifty miles by coach without having their necks broken, or their limbs shattered and amputated. "In my younger days," says he, "when I was on the eve of setting out on a journey, my wife was in the habit of giving me her parting blessing, concluding with the words, 'God bless you, my dear, I hope you will not be robbed.' But it is now changed to, 'God bless you, my dear, I hope you will not get your neck broke, and that you will bring all your legs safe home again.' Now, Mr. Editor, this neck-breaking and leg-amputating is all because one daring rascal wishes to show that he is a better coachman than another daring rascal; or because one proprietor on the road is determined not to be outdone by another.

"Neither can I think, sir, that such writers

as Mr. Nimrod mend the matter much. By a lively and technical description of these galloping coaches, he makes many a young man fancy himself a coachman, from which cause many an old man gets upset and hurt. For example: a friend of mine coming up to town a short time since by one of these galloping coaches, was upset and much injured. On going to sympathise with his misfortune, he informed me that the accident was occasioned by the leaders taking one road and the wheelers another; so between them both, over they went. 'My God!' said I, 'what was the coachman about; was he asleep, or drunk?' 'Neither,' replied my friend, '*he had nothing to do with it;* a young Oxonian was driving.' Now, Mr. Editor, it is not at all improbable but that this Oxonian had been reading your magazine the night before, instead of his classics, and meant the next day to put his theory into practice, by which my friend, a very worthy man, the father of a large family, nearly lost his life.

"Whoever takes up a newspaper in these eventful times, it is even betting whether an accident by coach, or a suicide, first meets the eye. Now really, as the month of November is fast approaching, when, from foggy weather and dark nights, both these calamities are likely to increase, I merely suggest the propriety of any unfortunate gentleman, resolved on self-destruction, trying to avoid the disgrace attached to it, by first taking a few journeys by some of these

Dreadnoughts, Highflyer, or Tally-ho coaches; as in all probability he may meet with as instant death as if he had let off one of Joe Manton's pistols in his mouth, or severed his head from his body with one of Mr. Palmer's best razors."

It was all very well to complain of these sportsmen, but what about the professionals? How, for instance, would he have relished being at the mercy of a man like the driver of one of the Birmingham coaches on the home stretch between London and Redbourne who, on one occasion, full of port and claret, could just manage to keep his seat, and in this condition started for London?

When "the drink was a-dying in him, like," and he felt more alive, he sprang his team at this dangerous part of the road known as Mimms Wash. Here he met the Manchester "Coburg" coming round a corner at a terrific pace. They met, with a resounding crash; the first coachman finding himself in the ditch and his leaders charging over it into the gates of a neighbouring park. The coach happily struck one of the posts and stopped dead. No one was killed and the worst that happened to the passengers was that one of them who had jumped off in alarm, sprained an ankle. He, very naturally, objected to complete the journey on the coach and had to be provided with a post-chaise at Barnet. Some of the other passengers went with him. Only one of the horses received any injury, and

that was the off-leader of the "Coburg," whose shoulder was smashed. This affair cost the tippling coachman £20, and he thought himself lucky (as indeed he was) that it was not worse. The same coachman, who by this time had reformed, met the "Coburg" on another occasion on this stretch of road. It was a moonlight night and the driver of the "Coburg" was on the wrong side in order to avoid some heaps of gravel thrown down in repairing the road. When he saw the other coach, the driver of the "Coburg" tried to cross over to his proper side, and in doing so, the heaped up gravel turned his coach over. The passengers were unhurt, and when they had righted the vehicle and found a baby who had been flung out of his mother's arms off the roof into a field, they resumed their journey.

XII

One shudders to think what would become of railway directors and shareholders if the old Law of Deodand were still in existence. It was an ancient enactment, going back to the days of the Saxon kings, by which the object causing the death of a person was forfeited for the benefit of his representatives. At least, that was originally the humane intention of the law,

which then really represented the etymology of its name, making it a God-given compensation. Sometimes the death-dealing object was valuable; occasionally it was practically valueless; just as might happen. But, like many another originally just and equitable thing, the Law of Deodand became perverted, and the inevitable Landowner found his account in it. It is difficult to follow the reasoning that, when the person killed left no representatives, made the offending object forfeit to the Lord of the Manor on whose land the accident might happen; but so it came about. Deodand became limited after a time, and instead of those interested receiving the full value of the thing causing death, a jury would sit to assess the damages due according to circumstances. Thus, when the Holyhead Mail ran over and killed a boy on the road near South Mimms, the deodand on the coach and horses was assessed by the coroner's jury at one sovereign. Rightly considered, however, deodand should not in this case have been levied at all, for the accident was entirely due to a group of three boys, of whom the deceased was one, darting across the road under the horses' heads to see how nearly they could come to the coach without being run over: a common feat with boys in those days, and one that ruined many a coachman's nerves. In this case the boy was killed, and clearly by his own fault. Had the deodand not been limited, a curious legal point might have arisen, as it had done

before, in the case of a man being killed by a horse and loaded waggon running over him; when, the value of the horse and waggon being claimed, the lawyers successfully raised the point that it was not the horse that killed the man but the waggon. In the result, the deodand was lessened by the value of the horse. This law was finally abolished before railways came into existence, or we might have seen locomotives and whole trains forfeited to relatives of the accidentally killed; or, failing these, to the Lord of the Manor in the particular spot where the accident happened.

A perhaps less sporting practice than that of permitting amateurs to handle the ribbons, but one certainly also less dangerous to the travelling public, was the wholly unauthorised and altogether illegitimate custom that began to obtain in later years of admitting a third person upon the box of the mails.

There was properly but one box seat beside the coachman, and this proud eminence was most ardently coveted by every man. In early coaching days it was attainable by an early appearance upon the scene and by tipping the yard porter; but when competition had rendered coach proprietors keener in their scent for fares, this pride of place was valued by them at a considerable advance upon the inglorious seats away from the bright effulgent genius who handled the ribbons, and diffused a strong odour of rum around "the bench."

There was a heavy penalty—£50, it has been said—against admitting a third person upon the box, the reason of this tremendous regulation being that the driver, it was considered, could not have sufficient room for doing his work properly when encumbered with more than one passenger on the box.

This heavy penalty, or part of it, was recoverable by any informer, and the result was that the roads were infested by such gentry, not only on the look-out for a contravention of the rule, but practising all manner of dodges to inveigle a good-natured or greedy coachman into letting a third man get up for "just a few miles."

But the game was so well known that such an application was apt to be answered by a coil of thong winding itself round the thighs of the applicant. There was one particularly active informer, Byers by name, who is referred to in the *Ingoldsby Legends* as "the accusing Byers, the Prince of Peripatetic Informers, and terror of Stage-coachmen, when such things were. Alack! alack!" says Barham, "the Railroads have ruined his 'vested interest.'"

The interests, "vested" or not, of these informers, were large and varied. Mail and stage-coachmen, postboys, travellers with their taxcarts, and waggoners, all contributed to their income. Sometimes these lynx-eyed fellows would find a coach carrying more passengers than it was licensed for. The discrepancy could be seen at a glance, for all stage-coaches were

bound to carry a conspicuous plate stating these particulars. Perhaps the guard would artfully hang a rug over it, and then the common informer, hanging about at the changing place, would lift it up and have a look; finding, after all, that the coach was only carrying its legal complement. Whereupon, the coachman and guard, who had been lying in wait for him, would duck him finely in the nearest horse-trough for his pains.

Even the humble turnpike men were liable to be informed against for not giving a ticket, for taking too much toll, or for not having their names displayed over their doorways.

There were at one time no fewer than five turnpike-gates between London and St. Albans, a distance of only just over twenty miles. The series originally began with the gate on Islington Green, removed afterwards to the Holloway Road, and was continued by the one at Highgate Archway, and others at Whetstone, and South Mimms; the fifth being at the entrance to St. Albans itself. These numerous gates within so comparatively short a distance, gave excellent opportunities to the informing gentry, who were wont to take little excursions into the country along this route, returning with memoranda that brought them a goodly return on their enterprise. They cast their nets wide and captured an astonishing diversity of fish. But their memoranda had to be made with discretion. It was a risky thing to be seen noting

down the name of a "collector of tolls," as a turnpike-man was officially styled. The present writer has held converse with an old man who once kept the toll-gate at South Mimms. Age had withered him, but custom had not staled his reminiscences. He had an especially favourite and Homeric story of an encounter with one of these pests.

It was springtime, and our toll-keeping friend had a mind to whitewash the exterior of his house. To this end he not only took down the climbing roses, that rendered his official residence a fugitive glimpse of beauty to those who fared the road by coach, but he also removed his name-board. To him entered, while engaged in wielding the whitewash brush, one of the informing species, who, thinking himself unobserved, made to examine the board, lying face downwards, on the ground. Our friend, however, was not so intent upon his whitewashing but that he saw with the tail of his eye what was toward behind him. He must have been a man of elemental passions, for he reached over, his brush fully charged, and delivered a staggering sideways blow with it upon the face of the unsuspecting note taker. "I gin him a good 'un," he always used to say; "but he come up for more, an' I punched his head and kicked his ——" No matter what he kicked. Suffice it to say that his language was forcible, adjectival, and Saxon.

XIII

The old road regains Telford's Holyhead Road of the Twenties a little distance short of South Mimms, close by where the cast-iron plate of the old milestone proclaims "Barnett" to be three miles distant. It crosses the broad highway at an acute angle and goes in an ascent, and with many curves behind the village;

SOUTH MIMMS.

descending again and almost returning upon itself through the village street, as though a circuitous course and the mounting of every hill were things greatly to be desired by travellers bound on a long and toilsome journey. South Mimms, village and church, is completely islanded by these old and new roads.

In the accompanying illustration, the church with the houses behind it may be seen standing on a knoll. It is a hillocky and picturesque place, with a church unspoiled by the restoration of 1868, and rustic cottages that might well be fifty, instead of less than fifteen, miles from London. The view is towards London, and the road in the foreground is Telford's; the old road coming steeply down and crossing again. There was an excellent reason for that ancient way taking such high ground at this point. It was for the accommodation of the village, and continued to be the main road until the days of a mere local intercourse between one parish and its next neighbour gave place to the more frequent and extended travel of later times, when direct communication between distant places became of much more importance than the convenience of wayside hamlets. The black despair that overtook the innkeepers and other frontagers relegated by Telford from a position in the midst of the traffic to a stagnant back-water of life may readily be imagined, but they received no compensation for this "worserment," which must have practically ruined many of them; nor did those more fortunate ones pay for betterment who, in the making of new roads, found themselves, from being in a bye-lane, suddenly placed in the best of situations, on the main road.

Mimms was not only infamous for its floods. In days of yore it harboured highwaymen and

footpads in plenty, and for quite a long time. It seems odd, nowadays, that a particular spot should have been of so evil a repute, and yet that no efforts were made to secure the rascals. A quaint document still preserved in the archives of the House of Lords recounts what befell William Symonds here in 1647. It is a petition in which he, as a prisoner in the King's Bench prison, prays for a new trial. It seems that he was entrusted by Henry Fitzhugh and Richard Wells with a sealed packet of money, for him to carry from Bedford to London, and that when he reached Mimms at break of day he was set upon and robbed by three or four thieves and lost not only the money, but almost all the rest of what he had to bring to London. He further says that he was no common carrier, and that he had not negligently lost the money. Yet Fitzhugh and Wells prosecuted him, and, obtaining judgment, laid him prisoner in the King's Bench. He concludes by praying for a new trial; but whether or not he ever obtained it does not appear. In any case, coming from Bedford to London, he had no business on this road.

The strange story of unfortunate William Symonds is followed by equally strange happenings some forty years later; when, for example, on November 9th, 1690, seven highwaymen not only robbed the Manchester carrier near this spot of £15,000, tax-money being conveyed from the Midlands to London, but also killed or

hamstrung eighteen horses of the escort, in order to prevent pursuit. It was a leisurely business and thoroughly well carried out; all travellers who were unlucky enough to be passing at the time being robbed first and then tied to wayside trees, where they were left to be released by later wayfarers. Two Roman Catholics were subsequently arrested on a charge of being concerned in this affair, and committed for trial, but it does not appear what happened to them. At any rate, whatever their fate may have been, it did not stop these outrages on the Holyhead Road; for, two years later, the most audacious bands were still at work in this district, reaping almost incredible plunder. On the night of August 23rd, 1692, for instance, the great Churchill, the terrible "Malbrouck," scourge of the foreigner on many a stricken field, tamely submitted to be robbed by the highwaymen who lay wait for him near "Coney," as Narcissus Luttrell calls London Colney, and plundered him of 500 guineas; a loss "which," says Macaulay, alluding to that great captain's miserly disposition, "he doubtless never ceased to regret to the last moment of his long career of prosperity and glory."

The plunder reaped by these daring highwaymen must have been immense, and inferior only to that bagged by modern company promoters. Three months later than their little parley with Marlborough, a party of eight or nine made a haul of between £1,500 and £2,000 out of a

waggon "near Barnet," and might have long continued their career had it not been for the King, who suspecting Roman Catholics and Jacobites in all these marauding bands, took measures that for a time effectually cleared the roads near London. Detachments of a regiment of Dragoons were posted some ten miles out, along all the great roads, and formed patrols. Captures were numerous, and executions almost as many. Among their notable seizures was that of Captain James Whitney, at some unspecified spot "at Barnet." In this later Battle of Barnet, between the soldiers and Whitney's band, December 6th, 1692, in which one dragoon was killed and several wounded, he was captured, and afterwards promptly hauled off to Newgate, amid great rejoicings, for he had been a terror in many widely separated districts of England. They hanged the "Captain," not at Tyburn but in Smithfield, in the beginning of 1693, and the roads knew an interval of peace.

The parish registers and churchwardens' accounts of South Mimms throw a further and a sombre light upon the history of the road, with their entries of "strangers" buried and "poor people" relieved. No fewer than seven "strangers" were found dead on the road, within the limits of the parish, in 1727, one of them having been drowned in Mimms Wash. Among other items in the accounts is one of 1737, "To a man that had the small-pox, to go forwards, 00 . 1 . 00*d*." Set down in this manner a

shilling looks a great deal, but what astonishes the reader of these things more than anything else is the heartless way in which the poor and the sick were given a trifle and hurried off to the next parish, to die on the way, if they would, in order that some other community should have the expense of them, or the infection, as the case might be.

XIV

The Holyhead Road goes broad and straight, and with a long perspective of dust-clouds and telegraph-poles, up Ridge Hill, where the borders of Middlesex are crossed and Hertfordshire entered; but the old way, after passing the "White Hart," crosses to the right hand and climbs up by itself as a deserted track. Near the hill-top it crosses again, and so descends on the left hand towards St. Albans. It is quite a narrow way, measuring at the most twelve feet across, against the average twenty feet of the modern road; and, sunk between deep banks as it is, giving rise to astonishment that a road such as this was, until the first quarter of the nineteenth century had nearly passed away, the chief means of communication between the capitals of England and Ireland. Nature, left to herself, has long since resumed sway over the old road, here and there scored with waggon-ruts through eighty years'

deposit of leaf-mould, or, in other places, become a green ride through the unchecked trees that grow along it and interlace overhead. It is a relic of Old England of the days before railways: no museum specimen, but an open-air survival, unnoted and untravelled; discovered by the few who, haply realising what it is, thread its winding course and leave the modern well worn road to the crowd.

Descending Ridge Hill, into the valley of the Colne, London Colney is reached, skirting the road by that insignificant stream, spanned by a picturesque old red-brick bridge, whose generous proportions seem to be much too large for so unassuming a runlet. Such criticism, however, is severely deprecated by those who know the Colne throughout the year. They tell wondrous stories of the things it is capable of. London Colney's name is perhaps not a very attractive one, but the place itself is exceedingly picturesque. Quaint village inns, timber-and-plaster gabled cottages, and old brick houses with a certain air of refinement that comes of chaste design and sound workmanship, are its constituent features.

The stretch of road between the northern face of Ridge Hill, London Colney, and St. Albans was always dreaded by coachmen in winter, for when snow fell in conjunction with a driving north or north-east wind, huge drifts resulted in this district. Ridge Hill formed a barrier against which the snow-charged wind battled,

THE OLD ROAD, RIDGE HILL.

with the result that a flurry of snow-wreaths gathered in the levels. The great storm that began with startling suddenness on the Christmas Day of 1836 was a great deal more widespread than any other experienced during the coaching age. Curiously enough, it had its exact counterpart precisely half a century later, when the terrible snowstorm of Christmas night, 1886, fell, equally without warning, from what had been a blue and sunshiny sky. The storm of 1836

LONDON COLNEY.

buried many coaches all over the country, particularly in the neighbourhood of St. Albans and Dunstable. The Manchester down mail of the 26th reached St. Albans, and, getting off the road into a hollow, was upset, and left where it fell, the guard returning to London with the bags and the passengers in a post-chaise. A mile distant from this accident, on the London side, a "chariot"—that is to say, a family carriage—was seen the next day without horses,

and nearly covered with snow; two ladies making frantic appeals from its windows for help, saying their postboy, having left them two hours before to go to St. Albans for fresh horses, had not returned. They could not be helped; and so, still wildly gesticulating, we leave them for ever, without the means of knowing whether that postboy ever *did* return.

The up Birmingham mail, *viâ* Aylesbury, also on the 26th, just managed to get beyond that town when it ran into a drift and thus suddenly ceased its journey. All attempts to force a way through were fruitless. Accordingly, Price, the guard, mounted one of the horses and, tying the mailbags on another, set out in this fashion for London. Joined a little later by two postboys on other horses, with the bye-bags, all three pushed on together, discovering now and again that they had wandered far from the road when the hoof of a horse chanced to strike on the top bar of a field-gate or stick in the summit of a hedge buried in the drifts. By great good fortune they reached London at last, exhausted, but safe. The passengers, who were quite a secondary consideration, were left behind to be dug out by the country folk, and taken back, somehow, to Aylesbury. The Chester and the Holyhead mails were embedded at the same time at Hockliffe.

On leaving the old-world village of London Colney behind, a distant view of St. Albans

THE GREAT SNOWSTORM, DEC. 26TH, 1836. THE LIVERPOOL MAIL PASSING TWO LADIES SNOWED UP ON RIDGE HILL IN THEIR CHARIOT, WITHOUT HORSES, THE POSTBOY HAVING RIDDEN TO ST. ALBANS FOR FRESH ONES.

From a Print after J. Pollard.

opens out, the Abbey first disclosing itself, and then the clock-tower in the market-place, followed by an indiscriminate grouping of roofs and chimneys. The Abbey—in recent years

ENTRANCE TO ST. ALBANS.

ennobled as a Cathedral and by consequence of that and the creation of the See conferring the dignified style of "city" upon the town—very rightly dominates all else.

XV.

We must penetrate very deeply into the past to reach the event that gave the City and Cathedral of St. Alban their name. So dim have records and traditions become, by reason of lapse of time, that it is not quite certain whether the year

A.D. 285 or A.D. 305 witnessed the martyrdom of that saint. By all accounts it would seem that the proto-martyr of Britain was a citizen of Verulamium, and a pagan, when the Diocletian persecution of Christians broke out; but a strange thing happened to turn him towards the Faith that already had made converts steadfast throughout many dangers and trials. To him came one Amphibalus, a Christian, seeking shelter from the fury of the persecutors; and, whether from innate nobility of character or from long friendship with the fugitive, Alban offered him the protection of his house. Sheltered thus, Amphibalus expounded to him the tenets of this new creed that had made enemies so bitter and so powerful, with the result that Alban himself became a Christian. It was not long before the fugitive's hiding-place was discovered, but Alban, filled with the newborn zeal that distinguishes the convert, secretly allowed his guest to depart, and then, acknowledging as much, cursed the gods and announced himself a Christian and prepared to suffer in his stead. Imprisonment and torture availed nothing to shake his resolution, and it was not long before the day dawned when he was led out from the gates of Verulam and beheaded upon that hill beyond the Roman city, now and for eleven hundred years past, the site of a succession of great churches set up in memory of him. Vague stories of a very early church erected upon the scene of the martyrdom may

be met with, but the relics of Saint Alban (as in the meanwhile he had become) had long been lost when, four hundred and eighty-seven years later, Offa, King of Mercia, penitent for having compassed the murder of Ethelbert, King of the East Angles, proposed to absolve his soul by founding a church over the scene of the martyr's agony. Divine light and a ray of fire are said by the legend to have conducted him to a certain spot called Holmhurst (that is to say "Holly wood") where the relics lay, and they were removed to the church he then built, or, as some accounts will have it, enlarged. Of that edifice only some doubtful fragments remain, for not only did Ealdred and Eadmer alter it about A.D. 950, but Paul de Caen, the first Norman Abbot after the Conquest, set himself to entirely rebuild it on a grander scale, little more than a hundred years later. Again, in A.D. 1195, rebuildings and enlargements were undertaken, and throughout the centuries very few decades have passed without something, good or ill, being done to the huge fabric. Huge it is, for it measures from end to end 550 feet, and is only surpassed in this particular by Winchester Cathedral, the longest in England; but only by seven feet. How great is the rise of the Holyhead road from London may be gathered from the fact that the ground on which the Cathedral of St. Alban stands is on a level with the cross on the dome of St. Paul's. The long story of the Abbey; how those slain in the

two battles of St. Albans are buried here and at St. Peter's; how it was sold to the people for a parish church for £400 after the dissolution of the monastery in 1539; how it in modern times became a Cathedral; and how Sir Gilbert Scott and Lord Grimthorpe successively have wrought havoc with their "restorations," at a total cost of over £166,000, are matters for ecclesiologists, and not for telling in a book on the road.

Far or near, the Abbey dominates the city, whose clustered roofs rise gradually toward where it stands on its elevated plateau, overlooking the quiet Hertfordshire meadows. Indeed, it stands on higher ground than any abbey or cathedral in England, the floor level at the crossing being 340 feet above mean sea-level. Lichfield is next highest, standing at 286 feet, and Durham, placed though it be on a craggy cliff beside the river Wear, comes only third, at 212 feet. St. Albans' very bulk is impressive, and, to the distant view, softened as it is by the smoke of the town chimneys, not unlovely, despite that long outline which rivals Winchester's great span; and though the crudities of the wealthy architectural amateur are insistent at close quarters they are fortunately lost in great measure from a distance. For where by-gone abbots strove so greatly to build in ages past, it is happily difficult for one man to largely alter the outline of their work.

A cheerful old place is St. Albans, crowning

ST. ALBANS CATHEDRAL.

its hill proudly with a mural crown, and rich in all the traditional attributes of a cathedral city—darkling nooks, quaint alleys, and ancient churches—satellites attendant upon the central fane. Before the present main road from London came into existence in 1794, the entrance was by Sopwell Lane, still in use, branching off to the left at something more than half a mile from the city. It is a steep and rugged way, leading down into the meadows where Sopwell ruins stand, and so to Holywell Hill, where an acute right-angle turn and a formidable climb used to bring the early coaches staggering into the market-place by the aid of an extra pair of horses. The Roman way, the famous "Watling Street," avoided the site of St. Albans altogether, and went considerably to the left of the Holyhead Road, to the valley of the Ver, where the ruins of Verulamium may yet be found below the hilly site of the monastery of St. Alban, founded by King Offa of Mercia in 793. It was the monks who in mediæval times diverted the Watling Street from its straight course to Verulam, and made the road from St. Stephens into St. Albans, by the tremendous descent and ascent of Holywell Hill. The travellers of those times came from London chiefly by the Watling Street, *viâ* Stanmore, Brockley Hill, and Elstree, and it was not until later that the present route came greatly into vogue.

This monkish interference with the road was by no means on behalf of travellers, but rather

from a highly developed sense of self-preservation. Before they laid hands upon it, traffic went by in the valley, and the town and monastery suffered from neglect. St. Albans Monastery, like other religious houses, did not exist by grants of land alone, but owned tolls and market-rights, and it was to increase the value of these that this drastic plan was adopted. Drastic, indeed, it was, for the paved Roman way was grubbed up and utterly destroyed from St. Stephens to Verulam, so that it became impossible to travel by it, and every one was then compelled to come into St. Albans by the mountainous Holywell Hill.

Verulamium had from the earliest times of the Roman settlement of Britain been the wealthiest of all the towns in this island. It possessed a theatre and all the graces of civilisation, but no walls or defences of any kind. Thus it was that when Boadicea, Queen of the Iceni, revolted under oppression in A.D. 61, it became the easiest, as well as the earliest prey of her avenging hosts. Verulamium and Londinium fell before their onslaughts, and in the massacres following, 70,000 persons are said to have perished, in addition to those who fell at Camulodunum.

Verulamium, in common with those other towns, was afterwards rebuilt, and grew more prosperous than before; but it met a similar fate some 400 years later, when the Roman troops left Britain, and barbaric hordes overwhelmed it in some obscure foray. The very

obscurity that clings about its end adds to the horror of those times. Those were wars of extermination, and none were left to tell the tale of how the great town and its people perished by fire and sword. Only when, in course of time, civilisation touched the Saxons, and historians were produced, do we hear anything of these long-ruined places, by that time become tinged with mystery and regarded with shrinking aversion. Bede, writing about A.D. 720, calls this "Waetlinga-ceaster," the city of the Watlings. In his time vast ruined walls and houses remained. Offa, when founding St. Albans Abbey, some seventy years later, was probably dissuaded by fears of the supernatural from drawing upon the ruins for building material. It was not so with those who rebuilt and enlarged his Abbey from time to time. They found and worked the ready mine of bricks and tiles, doubly valuable in that district innocent of stone, and thus it is that so little of ruined Verulam is left; but, gazing upon the Abbey, we see, in the immense quantities of Roman brick and tile that have gone towards its construction, that ancient Roman town in a manner re-incarnated.

Towards the middle of the tenth century, those ruins in the valley were a source of terror to the good folks of the rising town of St. Albans. In them lurked those outlaws — robbers, murderers, and general offscourings of society—for whom it would have been dangerous

to appear in the town, and who rendered it equally dangerous for law-abiding burgesses to wander far from their domestic hearths when the sun had set and darkness gathered. It was

MARKET-PLACE, ST. ALBANS.

partly for this reason, perhaps quite as much as for the use of the materials for building purposes, that so much of the ruins was removed by Ealdred, the eighth Abbot. He warred with the Verulam vagabonds, carting much of their harbourage away, and explored

a cave supposed to be inhabited by a dragon—who was not at home on that occasion. The good Abbot, however, is said to have found traces of the monster! His successor, Eadmer, was of the fiery sort. He, too, removed much building material, but the "pagan altars" found during his explorations he ground to powder—and so earns the maledictions of all antiquaries.

And so it went on for centuries. Stukeley, about 1690, noticed a good part of the walls standing, but, as he rode along, saw hundreds of loads of Roman bricks being carted off, to mend the highway.

XVI

The old entrance by Holywell Hill is the most charming part of St. Albans, with fine old red-brick mansions and old inns where the coaches and the post-chaises used to come. Many of the inns are either mere shadows of their former selves, or have been entirely altered to other uses, but their coach-entrances and yards remain to tell of what they once were. There stands a building now a girls' school, but once the "Old Crown," and close by the "White Hart," with "Saracen's Head Yard" beyond, but the "Saracen's Head" itself is now

divided into shops. In a continuous line up-hill were the "Angel," "Horsehead," "Dolphin," "Seven Stars," "Woolpack," "Peahen," and "Key"; which last house stood squarely on the site where the London road now enters the city. It was from the "Keyfield," at the back of this house, that the Yorkists burst into the streets and fell upon the Lancastrians in the first Battle of St. Albans, 1455. Another long-vanished inn was the "Castle," made famous by Shakespeare in a scene of *Henry VI.*, where Richard Plantagenet kills the Duke of Somerset, in this fight:—

> So, lie thou there:—
> For underneath an alehouse' paltry sign,
> The Castle in St. Alban's, Somerset
> Hath made the wizard famous in his death.

Somerset had been warned by a witch to "shun castles":—

> Let him shun castles;
> Safer shall he be upon the sandy plains,
> Than where castles mounted stand.

He could scarce have interpreted the prophecy in the crooked way it was verified.

Holywell Hill still echoes to the sound of the coach-horn, as the modern "Wonder," with an extra pair of horses, dashes up from the hollow to the "Peahen." The "Wonder," however, does not journey to and from St. Albans by the Holyhead road. Leaving London from the Hotel Victoria, Northumberland Avenue,

ST. PETER'S STREET AND TOWN HALL, ST. ALBANS, 1826. *From an Old Print.*

at 10.50 a.m., it follows somewhat the line of the Watling Street by Hendon, the "Welsh Harp," Edgware, Great Stanmore, Bushey, and Watford; reaching its destination at 1.50, and setting out on the return journey at 3.45. The "Wonder" has run daily to and from St. Albans, sometimes through the winter as well as summer, since 1882; owned by that consistent amateur of coaching, Mr. P. J. Rumney, familiarly known down the road and at Brighton as "Dr. Ridge," from his proprietorship of a certain world-famed "Food for Infants." But, before the "Wonder" came upon the scene, the modern coaching revival had provided St. Albans with summer coaches from about 1872. The now famous "Old Times" began to run, November 4th, 1878, and continued to St. Albans until the following spring, when it was transferred to Virginia Water.

The "Peahen," standing at the meeting of Holywell Hill and the London Road, has of late been rebuilt in a somewhat gorgeous and baronial style, but is the lineal descendant of a house of the same name in existence so far back as 1556. The name of the "Peahen" is thought to be unique.

Continuing the line of hostelries past the "Peahen" and the "Key," into Chequer Street, there were the "Chequers," the "Half Moon," and the "Bell"; and in French Row the "Fleur-de-Lis," and the "Old Christopher," still remaining. The "Great Red Lion" in

the market-place, has been rebuilt. Near it, in George Street, on the old road out of St. Albans, is the "George," one of the pleasantest old places still left, with an old red-brick front

THE "GEORGE."

and a picturesque courtyard. There was an inn on this site certainly as early as 1448, when it was mentioned as the "George upon the Hupe"—whatever that may mean. In those times it was a pilgrim's inn, and had an

oratory chapel. Nothing so interesting as that survives, but the old house has its features. The room to the right of the archway, used in old times, when a coach plied from the "George" to London and back every day, as a booking-office and waiting-room, remains in use as a parlour and rendezvous for the country-folk on market days, and all the summer the courtyard is like a bower with flowers and vines. Under the gable can be seen a spoil snatched from the destruction of old Holywell House in 1837 — the decorative carving from the pediment, a work representing Ceres, surrounded with emblems of agriculture its products, and attended by Cupids and shameless creatures of that sort.

To and from the "George" went daily the "Favourite" London coach, until the first of the railways came in May 1858, and ran it off the road. William Seymour, who used to drive it, then descended to the position of driver of an omnibus plying between St. Albans and Hatfield, but even that humble occupation was soon swept away by railway extension. He then became landlord of the "King Harry" inn at St. Stephens, and died at last, May 30th, 1869, in the Marlborough almshouses, St. Albans. Two other coaches in those days plied between St. Albans and London, generally taking three and a half hours. One came and went from the "Woolpack," and the other, the "Accommodation," from the "Fleur-de-Lis," French Row.

A particularly haughty and exclusive establishment was the "Verulam Arms." No common fellow who travelled by public conveyances was encouraged there. Only the lordly travellers who came in their own family coaches, or posted, ever sheltered beneath that condescending roof. The house remains, on the right-hand of Telford's new road leaving St. Albans, but had, as an hotel and posting-house, the shortest of careers. Built between 1827 and 1828, another ten years saw the coming of the railway. With that event vanished the trade of the "Verulam Arms." The house was soon closed, and has for fifty years past been a private residence. It is an extremely plain and uncompromisingly formal building in pallid brick, within railings enclosing a semi-circular drive. It is said that the Princess Victoria stayed here once. Some portions of the once extensive stable-yards and coach-houses remain, but the greater part of the grounds was taken, as long ago as 1848, as the site for a Roman Catholic Church, an unfortunate building discontinued and sold before completion, and finally purchased and finished as a Church of England place of worship, as it still remains, with the title of Christ Church. It would be difficult to find a more hideous building.

But a far higher antiquity than can be shown by any other house in St. Albans belongs to a little inn called the "Fighting Cocks," standing by the river Ver, below the Abbey. Its origin goes back to early monastic days, when the lower

part of this curious little octagonal building was a water-gate to the monastery, and known as

THE "FIGHTING COCKS."

St. Germain's Gate. Here the monks kept their nets, using the upper part as a fortification.

That embattled upper stage disappeared six hundred years ago, and in its place the upper storey of the inn is reared, in brick and timber, upon the stone substructure. The inn claims to be the oldest inhabited house in the kingdom, and exhibited until recently the inscription :—

The Old Round House,
Rebuilt after the Flood.

Obviously, judging from that old sign, the distinction between an eight-sided and a round house was too subtle to be noticed. The "Rebuilt after the Flood" does not (seeing where the house stands, beside the river Ver) necessarily mean the Deluge.

The hanging sign has of late years become pictorial. On one side the Cocks are to be seen, a whirling mass of contention, and on the other the victor stands proudly over the prostrate body of the vanquished, and indulges in a triumphant crow.

XVII

We often read in romances of the villainous innkeepers of long ago, who were in league with highwaymen, and we generally put those stories down as rather wild and far-fetched illustrations

of a bygone age. But there were many such innkeepers in the old road-faring times, and they were the highwaymen's best sources of information. Such an one was the host of an inn at St. Albans, who in 1718 was associated with Tom Garrett and another "road agent" working the highway between St. Albans and London, in an evil partnership. It is a pity that the sign of this inn is not specified; we should have gazed upon it with interest.

To this inn came one evening a gentleman travelling to London on horseback. The landlord himself helped him up to his bedroom with a weighty portmanteau which promised good plunder, and while his guest was preparing for supper, took the good news of a likely haul to Garrett and his partner, who were staying in the house. A pretty scheme was arranged on the instant, and the landlord, when his guest came downstairs, introduced his two confederates to him in the guise of travellers, also on their way to London the following morning, who would be glad of his company. The unsuspecting stranger, nothing loth to spend an evening in pleasant company, instead of sitting in solitary state, joined the other "travellers" with a good will, and they had a convivial night; setting out the next morning together. When they had reached a lonely part of the road near London Colney, the one covered him with a pistol while the other ransacked his portmanteau, taking all its contents, including a hundred guineas

from his person. Then they disappeared down a bye-road.

Our traveller sat mournfully by the roadside for a while, contemplating his empty pack and the reins of his horse, which had been cut by the two partners in crime. It was not long before he arrived at the very just conclusion that the landlord of the inn was a party to this business, and a very pretty little scheme occurred to him by which he saw the possibility of getting his own again. He carefully refilled his portmanteau with stones, and retracing his way to St. Albans, called first at a saddler's to have his reins mended, and then leaving the horse behind him, went back to the inn. When the rascally landlord saw him return with his baggage as heavy as before, he came to the natural conclusion that his confederates had not robbed the stranger, and cursed them under his breath for a pair of bungling fools. The returned traveller himself confirmed this impression, accounting for his reappearance by telling how an accident had happened to his nag. In the meantime, he said, before starting out again, he must have dinner, and only wished he could have had the pleasure of the company at that meal of the good fellows his host had introduced him to the night before. With much extravagant praise of their good and sociable qualities, he declared that he must really not lose sight of such fine fellows. Did mine host know where they lived in London?

That villainous tapster was quite deceived. He *did* know the addresses, and gave them. In due course, then, imagine our traveller once more on his way, and finally arriving in town. The next morning he called upon Garrett, in the guise of a "gentleman on important business." Garrett was still in bed, and could not be seen, having "just returned from a journey in the country."

To this he replied that it was urgent and important business, and this message brought the highwayman down. The traveller had not come without very potent persuaders to support his demand for his property. The one was a threat to have both highwaymen arrested; the other was a pistol. These inducements were successful, and his hundred guineas found their way back to his pockets, together with a portion of his other property. Then he made a similar call upon the other malefactor, who yielded up the other moiety of the contents of the portmanteau, and (as we are told by the contemporary historian of these things) another hundred guineas. We need not believe in this epic completeness and overflowing measure of justice and retribution. *There* lurks the eighteenth-century moralist, eager to cross the t's and dot the i's of every situation. But there is no reason why, up to that point, the story should not be true.

Before the road was remodelled by Telford, in 1826, the way out of St. Albans was past the "George" and down the steep descent of

Romeland and Fishpool Street, through the village of St. Michael's, and diagonally across a portion of Gorhambury Park, crossing the river Ver at Bow Bridge, at a point one and a half miles from the city, just short of Prae Mill. The present Holyhead Road, starting from the "Red Lion" in the Market Place, was in 1828 an entirely new work. It is described by Telford as a two miles' length, extending from the "Red Lion" to "Pond Yards," a spot probably identical with Shefford Mill, half a mile beyond Prae House, the site of the ancient hospital of St. Mary de la Pré, or de Pratis ("St. Mary of the Meadows") originally a retreat for women lepers, founded in 1190, and afterwards a Priory of Benedictine nuns, suppressed by Wolsey in 1528. Priory and mill are alike gone, but Prae House is seen on the left of the road, dwarfed by the embankment with which the roadway is raised securely above danger of flooding from the river Ver.

When the new road was completed, the old route through Gorhambury became private, and the entrance to it is now guarded, in the village of St. Michael's, by lodge gates. St. Michael's, now lying on the road to nowhere in particular, remains a sweetly old-world place, and the break-neck descent to it is one of the quaintest corners of St. Albans. Here old houses and quaint signs are the rule, and modern buildings the exception. The "Jackdaw," the "Cock and Flower Pot," and many other old names attract attention.

Curiosities of the geological sort at St. Michael's are the huge masses of conglomerate rock, or "pudding-stone," found here and there in prominent positions, having been dug up at different periods in the neighbourhood. The name of "pudding-stone" is excellently descriptive, the rock consisting entirely of pebbles welded together by some prehistoric force, and resembling, to the imaginative mind, Cyclopean

ST. MICHAEL'S.

fossilised fragments of some antediluvian plum-pudding, extraordinarily rich in plums.

St. Michael's Church, standing as it does almost in the centre of the site of old Verulamium, is largely built of Roman tiles. It is of many periods, from Saxon to Scottian and Grimthorpian, and of an extraordinary interest, somewhat blighted by the heavy hand of Sir Gilbert Scott, who "thoroughly restored" it in 1867, and the inconceivably heavier hand of Lord Grimthorpe, who pulled it about shamefully in

1897, utterly demolishing its quaint old rough-cast tower, and building a new one from his own amateur-architect design. The odd architectural details would be ridiculous if they were not pitiful, in view of the really interesting work they replace. One device, in especial, resembles a cycling free-wheel clutch rather than anything known in the whole range of Gothic design.

But greater than any other conceivable interest is the association of the great Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, Viscount St. Albans, with Gorhambury and St. Michael's. Bacon, who in his sixty-five years of life studied law, and rose to be Lord Chancellor, was a sufficiently remarkable man. Not only was he a successful lawyer and a diligent courtier, a philosopher, and the industrious author of essays, historical works, and the *Advancement of Learning*, but wrote all the plays attributed to Shakespeare, Greene, and Christopher Marlowe, as we are asked by ingenious latter-day discoverers of cryptograms to believe. Nay, not only so, but a rival Columbus on the stormy sea of cryptogramic discovery has even found that Francis was not the son of Nicholas Bacon, but the unacknowledged offspring of Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Leicester! This is startling, and lends an altogether novel interest to the statue of Bacon in the church, and the ruins of old Gorhambury House in the park. "Thus he sat," runs the inscription beneath the statue, seated in philosophic abstraction in an arm-chair, and truly

he looks wise enough for anything; but it was not serious wisdom alone that went towards the construction of Shakespeare's plays.

XVIII

Leaving the city of St. Alban, the river Ver is crossed at Prae House, and continues companionable as far as Redbourne, where it disappears in another direction, in deference to the rise on which Redbourne is built. That old coaching village is a veritable jewel of quaintness in the Queen Anne and Georgian sort. Red-brick houses of those reigns, and wayside hostelries with elaborate signs of wrought iron that seem to await the coming of the coaches again, are the chief of Redbourne's architectural features. Very conspicuous, although but the sign of a humble beer-house, is the pictorial sign of the "Mad Tom." Painted on a large circular plate of copper, it hangs out from the frontage, displaying a different picture on each of its two sides:—the first showing "Mad Tom in Bedlam," the second, "Mad Tom at Liberty." A very old sign, it represents one of those pauper lunatics who, in other ages, were confined in Bethlem Hospital, and who, when sufficiently recovered to be released, were provided with "briefs," or licences to beg a

livelihood. These "Mad Toms," as they were called, were once familiar figures upon the roads.

In the first picture, Tom is seen in a barred cell, madly clutching his hair: fetters load his arms and legs, and a loaf (a stale one, no doubt) stands on a bracket, and looks anything but appetising. The second scene shows him, gaily attired in white stockings and blue knee-

breeches, with a gorgeous red coat and a still more gorgeous turban, walking the road and blowing a trumpet.

The more rural part of Redbourne is quite away from the road, across a wide common traversed by a noble elm avenue. Beyond this, and in a hollow where a quite unsuspected street of ancient cottages is found, the exquisitely picturesque church stands. One may look in vain in the guide-books for any mention of its

beauties of colour and quaintness of detail that instantly capture the affections of the artist. Long may the restorer be kept at a proper distance, and the delicate silver-grey hues of the old plastered tower, the crumbling "clunch" stone, the patches of black flint and Roman tile and the unconventional beauty of the sixteenth-century brickwork be suffered to remain untouched.

Redbourne seems to have found favour in the eyes of sturdy Cobbett; but rather on negative than positive grounds, and on account of what it did not possess. "No villainous things of the fir tribe here," he observes, looking upon the landscape with approval. He missed a point though, at Friar's Wash, where the recurrent Ver or Verlam is seen to cross the road again, by the "Chequers" inn, where a hilly bye-lane goes off in a north-easterly

direction to Flamstead. But doubtless Cobbett missed the name, else we might well have heard him characteristically lashing out, something in this sort: "Friars' Wash! indeed. Good God, when *did* friars *wash*? Everybody knows, or *ought* to know that they did nothing of the sort, and counted personal uncleanliness as not merely next to godliness, but a constituent part of it. They were as dirty physically as Mr. Pitt and

REDBOURNE CHURCH.

his stock-jobbing and funding, fawning and slavering creatures are morally. Aye! and I tell you, poor down-trodden victims of an arbitrary government," etc., etc. Something of that kind Cobbett would have written in his *Rural Rides*. Indeed, the "friars austere, unwashed and unpleasantly yellow," as they were, by all accounts, might well have resented that naming of the ford as an unwarrantable

aspersion upon their well-earned reputation for an ancient and invincible dirtiness.

Flamstead, let it be noted, having originally been Verlamstead, owes its name directly to the river whose valley it overlooks from its hill-top. Its church-tower and characteristic Hertfordshire dwarf extinguisher spire may be

REDBOURNE.

glimpsed from the road, crowning a wooded ridge. The succeeding mile on to Markyate Street—the "River Hill improvement," as it was called—was one of the last pieces of work undertaken in the long series of Holyhead Road alterations, and was cut after 1830. The old road, still visible on the right, goes for the length of a mile as a steep and narrow lane,

almost parallel with the improved highway, and falls into it at the beginning of the village of Markyate, as it is shortly named nowadays. The "street" has only of late years been officially dropped by the General Post Office, in response to the request of the inhabitants, to whom, and to strangers having business here, the old address caused considerable trouble and misunderstanding; those not familiar with the place not unnaturally thinking "Markyate Street, Dunstable," to be a thoroughfare in that town, instead of, as a matter of fact, $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles distant. Markyate is indeed merely a street of houses fringing either side of the road, and what the old coachmen called a "thoroughfare village"; a long street certainly, but nothing else, and realising the Euclidian definition of a line, "length without breadth." It is an old-world place, drowsily conducting from Hertfordshire into Beds, with too many inns for its present needs, and one—the original "Sun" of coaching days—converted into a laundry and looking with severity upon the house directly opposite, that has assumed its old style and title.

Beyond Markyate, where the land shelves steeply down from the road on the right hand, is the lovely park of Markyate Cell, with a fine old Elizabethan manor-house, turreted, terraced, and with noble clusters of carved brick chimneys, once the site of a nunnery; and in a hollow—the roof of its absurd little Georgian red-brick

tower below the road level—the toy-like church of this beautiful domain. The rest of the way to Dunstable is lonely, Kensworth village hidden somewhere in the folds of the hills, and its Post Office only visible. At one mile from Dunstable remains an old toll-house, the first now met with on the journey from London.

It was on this stretch of road, between St. Albans and Hockliffe, that the gay and mercurial highwayman, "Gentleman Harry," did his last stroke of business, in the spring of 1747. Harry Simms had been highwayman, rover, soldier, sailor on board a man o' war, and, deserting and setting foot ashore at Bristol, became highwayman again. Having, as himself might have said, thus boxed the compass, his career was fully rounded off, and the only things necessary to complete it were a rope and a hangman. They were nearer than he thought, poor butterfly!

He had been a successful ruffler along the road in all his brief but varied career, and although a man of peace, and never known to enforce his demands for the turning out of pockets with anything worse than an oath and a well-assumed air of truculence, had always enjoyed exceptional fortune. It is scarce necessary to add that his gains were spent as freely as they were made: few highwaymen ever put anything by for a rainy day. On his return home, he amassed so great a store of gold watches, diamonds, and guineas, in so short a

time that, had they grown wild in the hedges, he could scarce have gleaned more, or more speedily. "*Jam satis*," he exclaimed (for he had been a Cambridge undergrad in his time, and loved a Latin tag) when coming out of Essex into Aldgate with his pockets bursting with gold rings and chains; and, putting up at the "Saracen's Head," determined to forswear the road and live cleanly on his accumulated wealth. An incident he had witnessed in the dusk, coming from Snaresbrook to Aldgate, had probably been the inducement to "the quiet life" thus contemplated. At the turnpike gate he had observed a gentleman arrested in mistake for himself!

So, leaving the "Saracen's Head" early the next morning, he set out on horseback on the long journey to Holyhead, proposing to voyage over to Dublin and there dispose of his plunder. Good resolutions filled his heart: he carolled as he went, in rivalry with the hedgeside warblers, and in this manner left St. Albans behind, and so came into this broad reach of the road near Redbourne. Unhappily for him, he had taken a little too much port at St. Albans, and the port disguised his prudence to that extent that, seeing three horsemen slowly ambling along the highway, he must needs resume his old trade and bid them "stand and deliver!"

"Gentleman Harry" had never been distinguished for his personal courage, and those who dared to disregard him generally found

themselves safe enough. The first of the travellers said he would not be robbed, and rode on; the second gave our friend a slash over the head with his riding-whip; and all three went their way. "Blood and wounds!" thought Simms, the wine fermenting in his brain; "shall I be scorned thus? Never!" And, in a drunken fury, he titupped after them, and really did secure a delivery. From one he received nine shillings, from another an old watch and seven shillings, and from the third two guineas and seventeen shillings.

Other spoil fell to him on the way, and when the Warrington stage hove in sight, he held it up with dramatic completeness and much financial success, spurring on to Dunstable in a tumult of port and professional pride. At the "Bull" he called for brandy, and had but raised the glass to his lips when the robbed coach came lumbering in, and the passengers entered the room where he was. How he rushed out, and, mounting his horse, dashed away, he never knew; but presently found himself at Hockliffe, where, in the kitchen of the "Star," with more brandy at his elbow, he fell into a drunken stupor by the fire.

The whole district was, however, aroused, and the road being searched while he lay in that condition. Three soldiers traced him to the "Star," and he awoke to find himself covered by their pistols. To them he yielded all his varied wealth, with the exception of a few trifles

hidden in his neckcloth, and then staggered up to bed with the troopers at his heels. There they watched him all night.

He was, as he says in his last account and confession of a wild career, "a good deal chagrined" at this. How to escape? He thought of a plan. Throwing the few remaining trinkets suddenly in the fire, the soldiers, as he had expected, made a dash to save them, while he pounced upon the pistols. He seized a couple, and, standing at the door, desperately pulled the triggers. The soldiers would probably have been sent to Kingdom Come but for the trifling circumstance that the weapons missed fire. It was a mishap that cost Simms his life, for he was quickly seized and more vigilantly guarded, and, when morning dawned, taken up to London on the road he had so blithely travelled the day before. One more journey followed—to Tyburn, where they hanged him in the following June.

The pilgrim of the roads who looks for the "Bull" at Dunstable, or the "Star" at Hockliffe, will not find those signs: the shrines of the saints and the haunts of the highwaymen are alike the food of ravenous Time.

XIX

Who shall say certainly how or when the phrase "Downright Dunstable" first arose, or what it originally meant. Not the present historian, who merely sucks his wisdom from local legends as he goes. And when it happens, as not infrequently is the case, they have no agreement, but lead the questing toiler after truth into *culs-de-sac* of falsehoods and blind-alleys and mazes of contradictions, the labour were surely as profitless as the mediæval search for the Philosopher's Stone. Briefly, then, "Downright Dunstable" is a figurative expression for either or both of two things: a state of helpless intoxication, or for that kind of candid speech often called "brutal frankness." At any rate, it is ill questing at Dunstable for light on the subject, and it is quite within the usual run of things to find the old saying unknown nowadays in the place that gave it birth.

There is no evidence in the long broad street of Dunstable town of the age and ancient importance of the place. It looks entirely modern, and the Priory church is hidden away on the right. When—in the course of a century or so—the young limes, sycamores, and chestnuts, planted on either side of that main thoroughfare, have grown to maturity, the view coming into Dunstable from London will be a noble one. At present it is merely neat and cheerful.

No mention is made of Dunstable in Doomsday Book. When that work was compiled, the old Roman station of Durocobrivae, occupied in turn by the Saxons and burnt to the ground by marauding Danes, lay in a heap of blackened ruins, the only living creatures in the neighbourhood the fierce robbers who lay wait for travellers at this ancient crossing of the Watling and the Icknield Streets. If any of the surveyors who took notes for the making of Doomsday Book were so rash as to come here for that purpose, certainly they must have perished in the doing. At that period and until the beginning of Henry I.'s reign the road was bordered by dense woodlands, affording a safe hiding-place for malefactors, chief among whom, according to an absurd monkish legend, purporting to account for the place-name, was a robber named Dun. The ruined town and the impenetrable thickets were known, they said, as "Dun's Stable."

The first step towards reclaiming the road and the ruins from anarchy and violence was the clearing of these woods. This was followed by the building of a house—probably a hunting-lodge—for the King, and the founding of the once powerful and stately Priory of Dunstable, portions of whose noble church remain to day as the parish church of the town. To the Augustine priors the town and its market rights were given, and the place, new-risen from its ashes, throve under the combined patronage of Church and State. Whatever the religious merits of those old

monks may have been, certainly they were business men, stock-raisers, and wool-growers of the first order. Their flocks and herds covered those downs that remain much the same now as eight hundred years ago, and their Dunstable wool was prized as the best in the kingdom. But these business-like monks were not altogether loved by the townsfolk, who resented the taxes laid upon them by the Church, all-powerful here in those days. It seemed to men unjust that fat priors and their crew should command the best of both worlds: should wield the keys of heaven and take heavy toll of goods in the market. The townsfolk, indeed, in 1229 made a bold stand, and protesting that they "would sooner go to hell than be taxed," vainly attempted to form a new settlement outside the town. The sole results were that they were taxed rather more heavily than before, and ecclesiastically cursed. To detail here the grandeur and the pride of that great Priory would be to halt too long on the way. All who had, in those ancient times, any business along this great road were entertained by the Prior. The common herd in those early days were entertained at the guest house, a building facing the main road, on a site now occupied by a house called "The Priory." King John in 1202 had given his hunting-lodge to the Priory, and from that time onward Kings and Queens were lodged in the Priory itself. Here rested —the next halting-place from Stony Stratford—

the body of Queen Eleanor on the way to Westminster, in 1290; and one of the long series of Eleanor crosses remained in the market-place until 1643, when it was destroyed by the Parliamentary troops. In the Lady Chapel (long since swept away) of the Priory Church, Cranmer promulgated the divorce of

DUNSTABLE PRIORY CHURCH.

Henry VIII. and Katherine of Arragon. Two years later, the Priory itself was dissolved. At first it seemed likely that Dunstable would be made the seat of a Bishop and the great church erected to the dignity of a Cathedral, but the project came to nothing, and the sole remaining portions of the old buildings are the nave and the west front. Presbytery, choir,

transepts, lady chapel, and aisles were torn down. The aisles and east end of the church are modern, the nave a majestic example of Norman architecture, and the west front a curiously picturesque mass of Transitional Norman, Early English, and Perpendicular, worthy the dexterous pencil of a Prout.

The spoliation of the Priory Church was a long but thorough process. Many of its carved stones are worked into houses and walls in and around the town, but it was left for modern times to complete the vandalism; when, for example, great numbers of decorative pillars and capitals were discovered, some put to use to form an "ornamental rockery" in a neighbouring garden, the remaining cartloads taken to a secluded spot in the downs and buried; when the stone coffin of a prior was sold for use as a horse-trough and afterwards broken up for road-metal; when a rector could find it possible to destroy a holy-water stoup, the old font could be thrown away, and the pulpit sold to a publican for the decoration of a tea-garden. Among other objects that have disappeared in modern times is the life-size effigy of St. Fredemund, the sole remaining portion of his shrine. Fredemund was a son of King Offa. His body had been brought hither in ancient times, on the way to Canterbury, but was, by some miraculous interposition, prevented from leaving Dunstable. No miracle saved his statue. The ancient sanctus bell of the church, inscribed "Ave

Maria, gracia plena," hangs on the wall of the modern town-hall.

"Dunstable," says Ogilby, writing in 1675, "is full of Inns for Accommodation, and noted for good Larks." This would seem to hint at an unwonted sprightliness in the hostelries and town of Dunstable, were it not that larks bore but one signification in Ogilby's day. Slang had not then stepped in to give the word a double meaning. Of the notable old inns of Dunstable the "Sugarloaf" remains, roomy and staid, reprobating unseemliness. Larks, like Dunstable wool in still older days, and straw-plaiting in more recent times, no longer render the town notable. Straw-plaiting and hat-making are, it is true, yet carried on, but the industry is a depressed one. A greater feature, perhaps, is seen in the extensive printing works established here in recent years by the great London firm of Waterlow & Sons.

XX

From Dunstable the road enters a deep chalk cutting through the Downs—similar to, but not so great a work as, the chalky gash through Butser Hill, on the Portsmouth Road. In this mile-length of cutting the traveller stews on still summer days, blinded by the chalky glare; or, when it blows great autumnal guns and snow-laden winter gales, whistling and roaring through

DUNSTABLE DOWNS.

this exposed gullet with the sound of a railway train, freezes to his very marrow. Before this cutting was made, and the "spoil" from it used in the making of the great embankment that carries the road above the deep succeeding valley, this was a precipitous ascent and descent, and a cruel tax upon horses. Looking backwards, the embankment is impressive, even in these days of great engineering feats, and proves to the eye how vigorously the question of road reform was being grappled with just before the introduction of railways. From this point the famous Dunstable Downs are well seen, rising in bold terraces and swelling hills from the hollow, and receding in fold upon fold of treeless wastes where the prehistoric Icknield Way runs and the stone implements and flint arrows dropped by primitive man for lack of reliable pockets, are found.

The neolithic ancestor seems to have been particularly fond of these windy hillsides, and has left a great earthwork on them, ten acres in extent. Maiden Bower they call it nowadays—as grotesquely unsuitable a corruption of the original "Maghdune-burh" as may well be imagined. Its wind-swept terraces, distinctly seen from this embankment, scarce give the idea of a boudoir. Neolithic man was fond of these hillsides in a purely negative way. He would have preferred the warmer valleys, only in those remote times they were filled with dense and almost impenetrable forests, and abounded in the fiercest and wildest of wild animals, that came

at night and preyed upon his family circle when the camp-fires burnt low. And when those wild creatures were not to be dreaded, there were always hostile tribes prowling in the thickets. So, on all counts, the Downs were safest. Where that remote ancestor built his bee-hive huts and banded together with his fellows to raise a fortified post, others—Britons, Romans, and Saxons—came and added more and taller earth-works, so that the tallest of them are sixteen feet high even now.

Shortly after leaving the embankment behind, a signpost marks a lane to the left, leading to Tilsworth, a dejected village, looking as though agricultural depression had hit it hard. A deserted schoolhouse, by the church, is falling to pieces. Just within the churchyard is a headstone, standing remotely apart from the others. Its isolation invites scrutiny; an attention rewarded by this epitaph:—

THIS STONE WAS ERECTED
BY SUBSCRIPTION
TO THE MEMORY OF
A FEMALE UNKNOWN
FOUND MURDER'D IN BLACKGROVE WOOD
AUG. 15TH 1821

Oh pause my friends and drop the silent tear
Attend and learn why I was buried here;
Perchance some distant earth had hid my clay
If I'd outliv'd the sad, the fatal day:
To you unknown, my case not understood;
From whence I came, or why in Blackgrove Wood.
This truth's too clear; and nearly all that's known—
I there was murder'd, and the villain's flown.
May God, whose piercing eye pursues his flight,
Pardon the crime, but bring the deed to light.

That the deed was "brought to light" is obvious enough, but that is not what the author of those lines meant. The perpetrator of the deed was never discovered. Blackgrove Wood, a dark mass in a little hollow, is easily seen from the road. In another two miles Hockliffe is reached.

XXI

"A DIRTY way leads you to Hockley, *alias* Hockley-in-the-Hole," said Ogilby, in 1675; and it seems to have gradually become worse during the next few years, for Celia Fiennes, confiding her adventures to her diary, about 1695, tells of "seven mile over a sad road. Called Hockley in y^e^ Hole, as full of deep slows in y^e^ winter it must be Empasable." It received, in fact, all the surface-water draining from Dunstable Downs to the south and Brickhills to the north. It is not, however, until he has left Hockliffe behind and started to climb out of it that the amateur of roads discovers how deeply in a hole Hockliffe is, for it is approached from the Dunstable side by a level stretch that dims the memory of the downs, and makes all those old tales of sloughs appear like fantastic inventions. It is at this time perhaps the most perfectly preserved example of Telford's roadmaking. Surface,

cross-drains, ditches, and hedges are maintained in as good condition as when first made. And why so more than in other places? For this very reason; that it *is* in a hole, and if not properly drained, would again become as "empasable" as it was over two hundred years ago.

Hockliffe, originally a very small village, grew to great importance in coaching times, for here is the junction of the Holyhead and Manchester and Liverpool roads, both in those times of the greatest vogue and highest importance. An after-glow of those radiant glories of the road is seen in the long street. Hockliffe was in Pennant's time, when coaching had grown enormously in importance, "a long range of houses, mostly inns." It is so now, with the difference that the houses mostly *have been* inns, and are so no longer. In his day he observed "the English rage for novelty" to be "strongly tempted by one sagacious publican, who informs us, on his sign, of newspapers being to be seen at his house *every day* in the week."

At which of the two principal inns, the "White Hart" or the "White Horse," this enterprising publican carried on business he does not tell us. Perhaps it was the "White Horse"; now certainly one of the most interesting of inns, and then the chiefest in Hockliffe. Before its hospitable door the "Holyhead Mail," the Shrewsbury "Greyhound," the

THE "WHITE HORSE," HOCKLIFFE.

Manchester "Telegraph," the Liverpool "Royal Umpire," and many another drew up, together with some of the many "Tally-Hoes" that spread a fierce rivalry down the road. It was probably at Hockliffe and at the hospitable door of the "White Horse," that the "Birmingham Tally-Ho" conveying Tom Brown to Rugby drew up at dawn "at the end of the fourth stage." We need not look for exact coaching data in that story; else, among other things, we might cavil at the description of it as a "little" roadside inn.

A bright fire gleaming through the red curtains of the bar window gave promise of good refreshment, and so while the horses were changed, the guard took Tom in to give him "a drop of something to keep the cold out," or rather to drive it out, for poor Tom's feet were already so cold that they might have been in the next world, for all he could feel of them, and the guard had to pick him off the coach-top and set him in the road. "Early purl" set that right, and warmed the cockles of his heart.

There is no nonsense of the plate-glass and electric-bell kind about the "White Horse." If the old coachmen were to come back, and the passengers they drove, they would find the old house much the same—the stables docked perhaps of some of their old extent and a trifle ruinous, and the house in these less palmy days crying out for some fresh paint and a few minor

repairs; but still the same well-remembered place. Even the windows in the gables, blocked up over a century ago to escape Mr. Pitt's window-tax, have not been re-opened. There are low-browed old rooms at the inn, with a cosy kitchen that is as much parlour; with undisguised oaken beams running overhead, rich in pendant hams that by due hanging have acquired artistic old-masterish tones, like mellow Morlands and rich Gainsboroughs. There is a capacious hearth, there are settles to sit easily in, and warming pans that have warmed many a bed for old-time travellers; and there are memories, too, for them that care to summon them. Will they come? Yes, I warrant you. They are memories chiefly of moving accidents by flood and fell, for Hockliffe has had more than its due share of coaching accidents. They happened chiefly on the hills a mile out, where Battlesden Park skirts the road, and where, although Telford did some embanking of the hollows and cutting of the crests, they remain formidable to this day. Battlesden became an ominous name in those days, and the "White Horse" and many another Hockliffe inn very like hospitals. The year 1835 was an especially disastrous one. In May, the "Hope" Halifax coach, on the way to London, was being driven down hill at a furious pace, when the horses became unmanageable, and the coach, overloaded with luggage piled up on the roof, after reeling in several directions,

fell on the off side. All the passengers were injured more or less severely. The next happening was when the Shrewsbury "Greyhound," coming towards London, was overturned at a point almost opposite Battlesden House. Again most of the passengers were seriously injured, and the coachman had a leg broken. Two of the horses suffered similar injuries. This accident was caused by the near-side wheeler kicking over the pole and thus upsetting the coach while it was running at high speed down hill. Of course, when the great Christmas snowstorm of 1836 blocked nearly all the roads in England, Hockliffe was a very special place for drifts, and the Birmingham, Manchester, Holyhead, Chester and Holyhead, and Halifax mails were all snowed up. An attempt made to drag the Chester mail out resulted in the fore-axle giving way and the coach being abandoned. The boys went forward on horseback. The Holyhead mail, with the Irish bags, was more fortunate. When the horses suddenly floundered up to their necks in the snow, the coachman dived off headlong, and was nearly suffocated; but with the aid of the guard and the passengers he was pulled out by the legs, and, a team of cart-horses being requisitioned, the coach itself dragged through. These are examples of the perils His Majesty's Mails encountered in those times, and of the discomforts endured by the men who carried them for little wage.

The Post Office has never been generous to the rank and file of its staff. The secretarial staff, whose business it is to receive complaints and to scientifically fob off the public with tardy promises of enquiries never intended to be made, draw handsome salaries, but those who do the actual work have always been paid something less than they could obtain from other walks of life. The guards in Post Office employment received half a guinea a week salary in the old mail-coach days—as, in fact, a retaining fee—it being estimated by the Department that they could make a good thing of it by the "tips" they would be receiving from passengers. That they did make a good thing of it we know, but the principle was a shabby one for a Government Department to adopt, and really created a kind of indirect taxation. No traveller could refuse to "tip" the guard as well as the coachman, unless very hard-hearted or possessed of a moral courage quite beyond the ordinary.

Beyond his half-guinea a week, an annual suit of clothes, and a superannuation allowance of seven shillings a week, a mail guard had no official prospects. Occasionally some crusty passenger, whom the guard, being extra busy with his letters and parcels, had perhaps no time to humour, would refuse to tip, and would write to the Post Office to complain; whereupon the Secretary would indite some humbug of this kind:—

"Sir,—I have the honour of your letter of

THE GREAT SNOWSTORM, DEC. 26TH, 1836. THE BIRMINGHAM MAIL FAST IN THE SNOW, WITH LITTLE CHANCE OF A SPEEDY RELEASE: THE GUARD PROCEEDING TO LONDON WITH THE LETTER-BAGS.

From a Print after J. Pollard.

the ——, to which I beg leave to observe that neither coachman nor guard should claim anything of 'vails' as a right, having ten and sixpence per week each; but the custom too much prevails of giving generally a shilling each at the end of the ground, but as a courtesy, not a right; and it is the absolute order of the office that they shall not use a word beyond solicitation. This is particularly strong in respect of the guard – for, indeed, over the coachman we have not much power; but if he drives less than thirty miles, as your first did, they should think themselves well content with sixpence from each passenger."

In those times sixpence might have been enough, but when, in later days, the coachman or the guard at the end of their respective journeys would come round with the significant remark, "I leaves you here, gentlemen!" he who offered sixpence would have been as daring as one who gave nothing at all. The sixpence would have been returned with a sarcastic courtesy, and a shilling not received with any remarks of gratitude. This custom was known as "kicking the passengers."

Very occasionally, and under pressure, the Post Office doled out an extra half-guinea in seasons of extraordinary severity, when passengers were few and tips scarce, and on occasions when the mails were so heavy that the seats generally occupied by passengers were given up to the bags, the guards had an allowance made

them. Their zeal under difficulties also received rare and grudging recognition, as when Thomas Sweatman, guard of the Chester mail in the early part of 1795, was awarded half a guinea for his labours at Hockliffe, where, in the middle of the night and up to his waist in water, he helped to put on new traces, travelling to town on his box with his wet clothes freezing to him.

XXII

THE red-brick face of the "White Horse" is set off and embellished by a very wealth of elaborate old Renaissance wood-carving that decorates the coach-entrance. It was obviously never intended for its present position, and is said to have come from an old manor-house at Chalgrave, demolished many years ago. Long exposure to the weather and generations of neglect have wrought sad havoc with this old work. A fragment in the kitchen gives the date 1566, and some strips under the archway, with the inscription "John Havil dwiling in cars," present a mystery not easy to solve.

The ominous Battlesden Park, belonging to the Dukes of Bedford, with jealously locked lodge-gates that hinder the harmless tourist from inspecting the church within the demesne, is one of a vast chain of Russell properties stretching for miles across country, from here to Woburn

and away to the Great North Road at Wansford. Battlesden is without a tenant, except for those who tenant family vaults and resting-places in the little churchyard: Duncombes within and nobodies in particular without. It was one of these Duncombes of Battlesden—Sir Samuel—who in 1624 introduced Sedan-chairs into England. Weeping marble cherubs on Duncombe monuments, rubbing marble knuckles into marble eyes, testify to grief overpast, but Nature, indifferent as ever, keeps a cheerful face. It here becomes evident that we are on the borders of a stone country, for the little church tower is partly built of that ferruginous sandstone whose rusty red and yellow is for the next thirty miles to become very noticeable.

Gaining the summit of Sandhill, a house lying back from the road, on the left, is seen, with traces of a slip-road to it and through its grass-grown stable-yard. It is a noticeable red-brick house, with a steep tiled roof crowned by a weather-vane. Once the "Peacock" inn, it has for many years been a private residence. A short distance beyond, past the cross-roads known as Sheep Lane, Bedfordshire is left behind for the county of Buckingham, through which for the next twelve miles, to the end of Stony Stratford, the Holyhead Road takes its way.

Buckinghamshire, on the map, is a quaintly shaped county, standing as it were on end, washing its feet in the Thames at Staines, and with its head in the Ouse, in the neighbourhood

of Olney. Wags have compared it with a cattle-goad, "because it sticks into Oxon and Herts." The glimmerings of possible similar verbal atrocities are apparent in the fact that it is also bordered by Beds and Berks. Northants and Middlesex also march with its frontiers. Its name is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word "bucken," alluding to the beech woods that spread over it, but more particularly in the south, on the densely wooded Chiltern Hills. The Welsh language, innocent of any word for the beech, bears out the statement of Cæsar, that this tree was unknown in Britain at the time of his invasion.

Little Brickhill is the first place that Buckinghamshire has to show, and a charming old-world place it is, despite its name, which, together with those of its brothers Great and Bow Brickhills near by, prepares the traveller for—of course—bricks. But the greater number of houses here are stone. It is difficult to imagine this little hillside village an assize town; but so it once was, and the "Sessions House," a small Tudor building, one of the few in red brick, still stands as a memento of the time when this was the scene of the General Gaol Delivery for the county of Bucks, from 1433 to 1638. The chief reason for this old-time judicial distinction appears in the fact that Aylesbury, the county town, was practically unapproachable during three parts of the year, owing to the infamously bad bye-roads.

The old "George" inn, that stands directly opposite the Sessions House, is not the only inn at Brickhill against whose name "*fuit*" must be written. Others, now vanished, were the "White Lion," now the Post Office, with some delicate decorative carving on its front (the old sign is still preserved upstairs); the "Swan," the "Shoulder of Mutton," and the "Waggon." The class of each one of these old houses may still be traced. The "George" was beyond

LITTLE BRICKHILL.

comparison the chief, and legends still linger of how the old fighting Marquis of Anglesey came up and stayed here as Lord Uxbridge with two legs, and returned after Waterloo as Lord Anglesey with one. They say, too, that the Princess Victoria once halted here the night. In the churchyard, that so steeply overlooks the road at the hither end of the village, you may see stones to the memory of William Ratcliffe, the last host of the "George," his wife,

his relatives, and his servants. He died, aged eighty-two, in 1856; his wife in 1842. Many years before, a servant, Charlotte Osborne, had died, aged thirty-eight; the stone "erected by three sisters, as a tribute of their regard for a faithful servant, and as a testimony to one who anxiously endeavoured to alleviate the sufferings of a beloved and lamented parent upon a dying bed." Here also is the epitaph of Isaac Webb,

YARD OF THE "GEORGE."

"for more than forty years a good and faithful servant to Mr. Ratcliffe of the 'George Inn,' during which he gained the esteem of all who knew him." He died, aged fifty-eight, in 1854.

The old "George" is now occupied—or partly occupied, for it is a very large house—by a farm bailiff. Just what it and its old coach-yard are like let these sketches tell.

Within the church a curious wooden-framed tablet records the death at Little Brickhill of an old-time traveller when journeying from

London to Chester. This was William Bennett, son of the Mayor of Chester. He died March 19th, 1658.

But most curious of all is the stone in the churchyard to a certain "True Blue," who died in 1725, aged fifty-seven. Time has lost all count of "True Blue," who or what he was, and speculation is futile. If only the vicar who entered his burial in the register had noted some particulars of him, how grateful we should be for the unveiling of this mystery! Those registers have, indeed, no little interest, containing as they do the gruesome records of many criminals executed in the old gaol deliveries, as well as of a woman who was wounded at the battle of Edge Hill and died of her hurts.

XXIII

A LONG and steep descent into the valley of the Ouse conducts from Little Brickhill into Fenny Stratford, seen in the distance, its roofs glimmering redly amid foliage. The river, a canal, and the low-lying flats illustrate very eloquently the "fenny" adjective in the place-name, and it is in truth a very amphibious, bargee, wharfingery, and mudlarky little town. Agriculture and canal-life mix oddly here. Wharves, the "Navigation" inn, and hunch-backed canal-bridges admit into the town; and

the lazy, willow-fringed Ouzel, with pastures and spreading cornfields on either side, bows one out of it at the other end. The arms of Fenny Stratford, to be seen carved above the church door, allude in their wavy lines to its riverain character, but, just as Ipswich and some other ancient ports bear curiously dimidiated arms showing monsters, half lions and half boats, so "Fenny" (as its inhabitants shortly and fondly call it) should bear for arms half a barge and half a plough, conjoined, with, for supporters, a bargee and a ploughman.

The church just mentioned is exceedingly ugly, and of the glorified-factory type common at the period when it was built. It owes its present form to Browne Willis, the antiquary, who built it in 1726, and, as an antiquary, ought to have known better. He dedicated it to St. Martin, in memory of his father, who was born in St. Martin's Lane, and died on St. Martin's Day. A kindly growth of ivy now screens the greater part of Browne Willis's egregious architecture. He lies buried beneath the altar, but his memory is kept green by celebration of St. Martin's Day, November 11th, when the half-dozen small carronades he presented to the town and now known as the "Fenny Poppers," fire a *feu-de-joie*, followed by morning service in the church and a dinner in the evening at the "Bull" inn.

Bletchley and its important railway junction have caused much building here in recent years,

and bid fair to presently link up with "Fenny," just as Wolverton with "Stony." The distance between the two Stratfords is a little over four miles, the villages of Loughton and Shenley, away from the road, in between, and the main line of the London and North-Western Railway crossing the road on the skew-bridge described in a rapturous railway-guide of 1838 as a "stupendous iron bridge, which has a most noble appearance from below." At the cross-roads between these two retiring villages stands the "Talbot," a red-brick coaching inn, mournful in these days and descended to the lower status of a wayside public. It lost its trade at the close of 1838, when the London and Birmingham Railway was completed, but, with other neighbouring inns, did a brisk business at the last, when the line was opened for traffic only as far as "Denbigh Hall," in the April of that year. The temporary station of that name was situated at the spot where the railway touches the road, at the skew-bridge just passed. Between this point and Rugby, while Stephenson's contractors were wrestling with the difficulties of the great Roade cutting and the long drawn perils of Kilsby Tunnel, coaches and conveyances of all kinds were run by the railway company, or by William Chaplin, for meeting the trains and conveying passengers the thirty-eight miles across the gap in the rail. From Rugby to Birmingham the railway journey was resumed.

"Denbigh Hall" no longer figures in the time-tables, for the idea of a "secondary station," once proposed to be established here was abandoned. But while the break in the line continued this was a busy place. It is best described in the words of one who saw it then:—

"Denbigh Hall, *alias hovel*, bears much the appearance of a race-course, where tents are in the place of horses—lots of horses, but not much stabling; coachmen, postboys, post-horses, and a grand stand! Here the trains must stop, for the very excellent reason that *they can't go any further*. On my arrival I was rather surprised to find all the buildings belonging to the Railway Company of such a temporary description; but this Station will become only a secondary one when the line is opened to Wolverton. There is but one solitary public-house, once rejoicing in the name of the 'Pig and Whistle,' but now dignified by the title of 'Denbigh Hall Inn,' newly named by Mr. Calcraft, the brewer, who has lately bought the house. Brewers are very fond of buying up inns, to prevent, I suppose, other people supplying the public with bad beer, wishing to have that privilege themselves. The unexpected demands for accommodation at this now famed place obliged the industrious landlord to immediately convert his parlour into a coffee-room, the bar into a parlour, the kitchen into a bar, the stable into a kitchen, the pig-sty

into a stable, and tents into straw bedrooms by night, and dining-rooms by day."

Another contemporary says: "The building called 'Denbigh Hall,' respecting which the reader may have formed the same conception as ourselves, and imagined it to be the august mansion of some illustrious grandee, is nothing but a miserable hostelry of the lowest order, a paltry public-house, or 'Tom and Jerry shop,' as we heard an indignant fellow-traveller contemptuously style it, which has taken the liberty of assuming this magnificent appellation." Tradition described how this house, once called the "Marquis of Granby," had been resorted to by the Earl of Denbigh on one occasion when his carriage had broken down, and that he stayed the night under its roof, and was so grateful for the attentions of the host that he left some property to that fortunate man, who thereupon changed the name of his sign to the "Denbigh Hall." This, at any rate, was the story told when the London and Birmingham Railway was first opened. There were those who looked upon it as a myth invented for the amusement of travellers, and perhaps those sceptics were right, but let others who are not unwilling to believe the story, hug the apt reflection that so unusual a sign must have had an unusual origin; and, so much being granted, let them go a little further and accept the legend as it is told. The little inn still stands by the wayside.

XXIV

Stony Stratford, a hundred years ago "principally inhabited by lace-makers, with women and children at almost every door, industriously employed in this manufacture," is now perhaps best known for the famous *non sequitur* associated with it. "You may well call it Stony Stratford," said the tormented traveller, "I was never so bitten with fleas in my life!" It would be ill questing among the old inns of "Stony" to discover which of them could claim the doubtful honour of giving rise to that ancient jest. There are many inns—the "Cock," the "Bull," "George," "White Swan," and numerous others—but among them the "Cock" is easily first in size and architectural dignity. The explorer, entering the mile-long street of Stony Stratford at "Tram-end," whence a hideous steam-tramcar plies to Wolverton, a mile and a half away, discovers no focus of interest in the long thoroughfare stretching out before him, excepting in the old red-brick frontage of the "Cock," with its handsome wrought-iron sign and beautiful late seventeenth-century oak doorway, brought, according to tradition, from some old manor-house near Olney; or "Ony," as they choose to call it in the neighbourhood. It was not always so undistinguished a street, for in it stood one of the twelve crosses erected to mark where the body of Queen Eleanor had

STONY STRATFORD.

rested on the way from Harby in Northants, to Westminster. It was wrecked, with others, in 1646.

Stony Stratford and its immediate neighbourhood are intimately concerned in the events leading up to the tragedy of young King Edward V. and his brother, murdered in the Tower of London, in 1483. Scarce three miles beyond the town, and distinctly seen from the Holyhead Road, there stands an ancient and historic house known as Potterspury Lodge, at the end of a long and majestic avenue of limes. This was at one time a hunting-lodge, and borders upon what is left of the sylvan glades of Whittlebury Forest, once a Royal Chase of the enormous extent of thirty-two square miles, but shrunken for centuries past into woodlands of not one quarter the original area. In times long gone by, the Forest began at the very end of Stony Stratford, and the timorous wayfarer plunged at once, after crossing the river Ouse, into its dim and tangled alleys of oaks and thick undergrowth.

It was when hunting in this wild resort of deer in the short January days of 1464, that Edward IV. met Elizabeth Woodville, not more than two hundred yards to the rear of the spot where the old hunting-lodge stands. The place of meeting is still marked by the ancient and gigantic tree known far and wide as the "Queen's Oak," a gnarled and hollowed giant, whose trunk measures thirty-one feet round

and whose cavernous interior can, and constantly does in summer-time, seat a tea-party of three or four persons. It must have been a notable tree when, four hundred and forty years ago,

QUEEN'S OAK.

Edward, a king peculiarly susceptible to female loveliness, found here the beautiful young widow of Sir John Grey of Groby, a knight who had been killed in the second battle of St. Albans, little more than two years before, on the

Lancastrian side, and whose estates had since been confiscated by the Yorkists. The story tells that the beautiful and distressed lady, anxious to see the King and to obtain from him the restoration of her lands, was waiting at the oak when he rode by, and that, not recognising him, she asked where his Majesty could be found. The probabilities are, however, that she knew perfectly well to whom she spoke. Edward declared himself to be the one she sought, and, when she fell upon her knees, raised her up and escorted her to her home at Grafton. It is a historic instance of calculating ambition and of love at first sight. On May 1st, then, Edward was privately married to the fair stranger at Grafton, the only others present being her stepmother, the Dowager Duchess of Bedford, two gentlemen, and "a young man to help the priest sing." Not until the Michaelmas following was the marriage disclosed.

The new-made Queen came of the old family of Wydvil, Widville, or Woodville, as it is variously spelled, settled at Grafton certainly three hundred years before. They now rose at once into favour, and her father, already Baron, was then created Earl Rivers. It was, however, a bloody and fatal alliance. Securing the allegiance of the family to the Yorkists, its firstfruits were the capture and execution of her father and brother at the obscure battle on Danesmoor, when the King's adherents were defeated by a rabble insurrection out of the

north. Taken to Northampton, Earl Rivers and his son, Sir John Woodville, were beheaded August 12th, 1469.

Edward IV. died early in 1483. His Queen survived him, with two sons and five daughters. The eldest, Edward, now become Edward V., was but twelve years of age, and he and his brother, Richard, Duke of York, were under the guardianship of their maternal uncle, the second Earl Rivers. The news of his father's death brought the young King, with an escort of two thousand horse, from Ludlow Castle towards London. That was the proudest moment in the history of the Woodvilles. Disliked and feared as they had been for nearly twenty years, of family aggrandisement they had now secured supreme power. But they reckoned without the sinister figure of Richard of Gloucester, the late King's brother, at that moment hasting southward from warring with the Scots. The hurried journeys of both parties toward London read like moves in some bloody game of chess. Richard of Gloucester, reaching York, had been the first to swear allegiance to his nephew. That done, he continued southward, receiving as he went tidings of popular discontent with the Woodville faction. The news strengthened him in the design, already forming in his mind, of seizing the Crown for himself. He reached Northampton simultaneously with the arrival of the young King at Stony Stratford, sixteen miles away. The next day saw him here, professing loyalty

on bended knee, and at the same time dismissing the King's attendants and disarming his escort. It was a clever and a daring move, that, if bungled in the doing, might have led to another battle, to be counted among the many fought on English soil.

Everything was now in the usurper's hands. The boy-King, in tears, and virtually a prisoner, was taken by him to Northampton, and thence to London, where all might yet have been well had public opinion disapproved of what had already been done. But the past insolence and selfishness of the Woodvilles had earned them a bitter hatred.

The young King's maternal uncle and guardian had in the meanwhile been seized and hurried to Pontefract, where he was beheaded, no one raising a voice in protest. The King himself and his young brother, Richard, Duke of York, were in custody in the Tower, and it was not until Gloucester had been offered the Crown by his creatures, and had with feigned reluctance accepted it, that the nation woke up to an understanding of the crafty conspiracy in which it had taken a passive hand. It was then too late, and the horror with which the country soon learnt that the young King and his brother had been murdered in the Tower was without avail to overthrow the sanguinary hunchback who now ruled as Richard III.

Such was the tragedy that overwhelmed the ambition of the Woodvilles, springing from that

May-day marriage of 1464. The Queen, sorrowing in the Sanctuary at Westminster, had seen her father, her two brothers, and her two sons cruelly put to death, as a direct consequence of that alliance. She retired, forlorn, to the seclusion of Bermondsey Abbey; seeing, it is true, a gleam of happiness in the overthrow of Richard two years later, and the marriage of her eldest daughter, Elizabeth of York, to Henry VII., but dying broken and disappointed, leaving in her will to her daughters, "my blessing, for worldly goods I have none to bestow."

XXV

From "Stony's" mild annals the two fires that in 1736 and 1742 destroyed great parts of the town stand forth with appropriate luridity. The second was the more destructive, and was caused by the carelessness of a servant, who accidentally set some sheets ablaze. The flaming linen, alighting on a thatched roof, brought about, not only the destruction of many houses, but also of one of the two churches. The tower, the sole relic of that unfortunate building, yet remains in the rear of the High Street, and was for some years rendered conspicuous by an elder-tree taking root and flourishing on the

battlements. The remaining church, rebuilt, with the exception of the tower in 1776, is a weird and wonderful eighteenth-century attempt at Gothic. It is the tower of this church that looks so picturesque from the Market Place, an obscure square, hidden from those who hurry along the High Street and so through the town

MARKET-PLACE, STONY STRATFORD.

and out at the other end, looking neither to right nor left.

The town is left behind by way of a long causeway and a bridge spanning the Ouse, in succession to the "street ford" that once plunged through it. Once across the river and the canal that runs parallel, and so uphill into the not

unpicturesque village of Old Stratford and the frontiers of Buckinghamshire—"the historic county of Bucks," as Disraeli, posing as a Buckinghamshire farmer in one of his after-dinner political speeches called it—are crossed and Northamptonshire entered. Northants is traditionally the "county of squires and spires"; but the squire as a political force and a great social figure is extinct nowadays, and let it be said at once that, in all the twenty-three miles of Northants through which the Holyhead Road takes its way, only one spire—that of Braunston—is visible: the rest of the churches on the way have towers, save indeed the freakish, classical church of Daventry, rejoicing in a steeple.

Potterspury, succeeding to Old Stratford, is a kind of brother village, as it were, to Paulerspury, a mile away. Potterspury, really owing its name to an ancient pottery trade in common ware of the kitchen utensil and flower-pot sort, stands partly facing the old coach-road and partly down a bye-lane, and is wholly old-world and delightful. One comes into it under the thickly interlacing branches of tall hedgerow elms that conspire to cheer the traveller with a perpetual triumphal arch of welcome. Through this leafy bower one perceives the roadside cottages dwindling away in perspective along a gentle rise. Graceless the village looks awhile, for no church meets the gaze. *That*, however, is a long distance down the bye-lane, and in the neighbourhood of a little inn with the odd

name of the "Blue Ball," and the still more odd sign pictured in the accompanying sketch. The blue ball, apparently representing the world,

THE "BLUE BALL."

is placed below a brown heart, the whole mystical composition semi-circled by the motto "*Cor supra mundum*." It is a representation of the triumph of sentiment that would have caused

the Rev. Laurence Sterne to shed tears. "Heart above the world." How idyllic!

It would be as vain to seek the old potteries that gave its name to Potterspury as it would be to enquire for any living representatives of the Paveleys who provided Paulerspury with style and title. The potteries vanished in times beyond the memory of man, and the sole relics of the Paveleys are the thirteenth-century wooden effigies of Sir Laurence de Paveley and his dame in Paulerspury Church.

At some little distance beyond Potterspury, Potterspury Lodge and its lime avenue come in sight, on the right side of the road. A wonderfully picturesque old mansion it is, recently restored by the retired tradesman who has purchased the property. At the rear of the house stands the historic "Queen's Oak," whose story has already been told.

The remaining four miles into Towcester, though hilly, had much of their difficulties disposed of when Telford came this way with theodolite, chain, and spirit-level. Plumb Park Hill is not what it was, thanks to this fifteen-foot cutting and the forty-four foot high embankment in the hollow of Cuttle Mill, where the road goes nowadays on a level with the chimney-pots of old roadside cottages.

At the crest of one of these rises stand Havencote Houses, which it pleased the compilers of old road-books to name "Heathencott," and beyond come the lodges of Sir Thomas

Hesketh's domain—Easton Neston Park, an originally fine, but now somewhat dreary parade of classical stone columns forming an open screen, with stone stags couchant, and a central display of a coat-of-arms supported by weary-looking lions. The motto, "*Hora e Semper*"—"Now and Always"—bids a futile defiance to irresistible change.

The lodges on either side are deserted, and their windows boarded up. Somewhere within the park stand the "great house" and the manorial church, with monuments of the Fermors, successively Barons Lempster and Earls of Pomfret, to whom the estates came so long ago as 1527. Those titles, duly engrossed on their original patents in that manner of spelling, derive from the towns of Leominster and Pontefract, and prove the local pronunciation to have been the same then as now. They prove, in addition, that there was no person then at the Heralds' College who could correctly spell the names of those places; but my Lords Lempster and Pomfret had to take and use the illiterate forms, just as the Earl of Arlington, whose title, conferred in 1663, came from Harlington in Middlesex, was made by those 'eralds to write himself with every signature an 'Arry.

XXVI

WHERE the park-wall of Easton Neston ends, Towcester—"*vulgo* Tosseter," as Ogilby says, on the Towe, and once the *Lactodorum* of the Romans—begins. It is not the best of beginnings, or one calculated to favourably impress the stranger with the town. On the left hand rises a terrace of dingy brick houses, whose age is certified by the inscription, "Jubilee Row, 1809"; their height masked by the raising of the road in front, in Telford's improvements of 1820, their social status evident in the notice on their frontages, "Lodgings for Travellers"—tramping travellers being understood. Beyond, Towcester unwinds its one long street of brick, stone, and plaster, with roofs, tiled, slated, and thatched: a very miscellaneous street. Among the houses, ancient, modern, and middle-aged; among the few dignified old stone mansions of golden russet stone, and the older, but more familiar, gabled plastered houses, that nod as though they could tell a thing or two worth the hearing; among these and the less interesting brick dwellings stand the Bickerstaff Almshouses, "rebuilt in the year 1815," brick themselves and wholly uninteresting, except for the tablet preserved from the older buildings:—

> Hee that earneth Wages By labour and
> care By the Blessing of god may
> Have Something to Spare. T. B.
> 1689.

Only when the Town Hall is reached, at a considerable distance along this street, may we fairly claim to have entered Towcester. All this hitherward part is outside the pale, as it were, and looked down upon, contemned, and sniffed at. It can only be looked down upon in a social, ungeographical sense, for Towcester from end to end is flat; but those who would sniff corporeally as well as mentally will not go unrewarded, considering that the gas-works occupy a very prominent position here. The Town Hall, built in 1866, when the flighty and Mansard-roofy French Renaissance was the architectural craze of the moment, turns its back to this quarter and shoulders the broad street into the semblance of a narrow lane, emphasising the difference between these social strata.

Emerging from this narrow way, a broad street of inns and shops expands. On the left is the "Talbot," an old inn with modern front, and with a long perspective of stables vanishing down its yard into the dim distance. The "Talbot," it is thought, owes its present name to that Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, who fought and died in the Battle of Northampton, eight miles away, in 1460. As the "Tabard," it was purchased in 1440 by Archdeacon Sponne, a charitable Rector of Towcester, who gave it to the town, its rent to go in relief of taxation, toward paving, "or for other uses." The good Archdeacon lies, under a gorgeous monument, in the church, and a fragment of stained glass bearing

his shield of arms, with his name, "William Sponne" underneath, still remains in one of the windows of the "Talbot." In what was once, in coaching days, the taproom, but now a store for empty boxes and such lumber, a relic of old times is left, in the wide stone chimney-piece carved with the figure of that old English hound, something between a foxhound and blood-hound—the talbot. Beside it is the date, 1707, together with the initials, "T.O." and "G.S." The story that Dean Swift halted often at the old house on his many journeys is likely enough, and a chair, said to have been used by him, is still a cherished relic.

But another, and equally famous, hostelry claims attention. The "Pomfret Arms," as it is now named, is the old coaching inn once known as the "Saracen's Head," the inn where Mr. Pickwick stayed the night after the wet postchaise journey from Birmingham. "Dry postboys" and fresh horses had been procured on the way, at the usual stages at Dunchurch and Daventry; but as, "at the end of each stage it rained harder than it had done at the beginning," Mr. Pickwick wisely decided to halt at Towcester, together with those undesirable companions of his, Bob Sawyer and Ben Allen.

"There's beds here," said Sam Weller, "everything clean and comfortable. Wery good little dinner, sir, they can get ready in half an hour—pair of fowls, sir, and a weal cutlet; French beans, 'taturs, tarts, and tidiness. You'd

better stop vere you are, sir, if I might recommend."

At the moment when this conference was proceeding in the rain, the landlord of the "Saracen's Head" himself appeared, "to confirm Mr. Weller's statement relative to the accommodations of the establishment, and to back his entreaties with a variety of dismal conjectures regarding the state of the roads, the doubt of fresh horses being to be had at the next stage, the dead certainty of its raining all night, the equally moral certainty of its clearing up in the morning, and other topics of inducement familiar to innkeepers."

When the decision to stay was arrived at, "the landlord smiled his delight," and issued orders to the waiter. "Lights in the Sun, John; make up the fire; the gentlemen are wet," he cried anxiously; although doubtless, if the gentlemen had gone forward, they might have been drowned for all he cared.

"This way, gentlemen," he continued; "don't trouble yourselves about the postboy"—who, poor devil, must have been wet through several times over—"I'll send him to you when you ring for him, sir."

And so the scene changes, from the rain-washed road to a cosy room, with a waiter laying the cloth for dinner, a cheerful fire burning, and the tables lit with wax candles; "everything looked (as everything always does in all decent English inns) as if the travellers had been

expected, and their comforts prepared for, days beforehand."

Upon this picture of ease at one's inn descended the atrabilious rival editors of the *Eatanswill Gazette* and the *Eatanswill Independent*, the organs respectively of "blue" and "buff" shades of political opinion. Both Pott of the *Gazette*, and Slurk of the *Independent* found the rival sheet lying on the tables of the inn; but what either of the editors, or their newspapers, were doing in Northamptonshire (Eatanswill being an East Anglian town generally identified as Ipswch) is not clearly specified. Even in these days Suffolk newspapers are not found at Towcester.

Slurk retired to the kitchen when the inn was closed for the night, to drink his rum and water by the fire, and to enjoy the bitter-sweet luxury of sneering at the rival print; but as it happened, Mr. Pickwick's party, accompanied by Pott, also adjourned to that culinary shrine, to smoke a cigar or so before bed. How the rival editors—the "unmitigated viper" and the "ungrammatical twaddler"—met and presently came from oblique taunts to direct abuse of one another, and thence to blows, let the pages of the *Pickwick Papers* tell.

The inn itself stands the same as ever, at the end of Towcester's long street; but the sign, long since changed, owes its present style to the Earls of Pomfret, of whom the fifth and last died in 1867. The somewhat severe frontage, in the

golden-brown ferruginous local stone, is the same as when Dickens knew it, and if the kitchen of that time has now become the bar and the room called the "Sun" cannot with certainty be identified, the old coach-archway through the centre of the building into the stable-yard remains, as do the alcoves above, containing white plaster statuettes of two very scantily draped classic deities—Venus and Mars perhaps. They still tell at Towcester the tale of an old landlady—Mrs. Popple—coming new to the house, and asking the old ostler what "those disgraceful things" were.

"They carls 'em Junus and Wenus," he said, "but I don't rightly knaw the history on 'em; but there, mum, you'll find arl about 'em in the Bible."

XXVII

We shall not be far wrong if we identify Towcester with the town at which the coach with Tom Brown on board stopped for breakfast, and the "well-known sporting house," famous for its breakfasts, with the "Saracen's Head." A half-past seven breakfast, in a low, dark, wainscoted room, hung with sporting prints; a blazing fire, and a card of hunting fixtures stuck in the mantel-glass. Twenty minutes

for breakfast, with such a spread as pigeon-pie, ham, cold boiled beef, kidneys and steak, bacon and eggs, buttered toast and muffins, coffee and tea, smoking hot—why, an irresolute man would waste some of those precious minutes in considering where to begin. But the hungry are not at such a loss, and certainly little Tom Brown could not have been, for he ate kidney and pigeon-pie and drank coffee till his skin was as tight as a drum, and then had sufficient time to pay the head waiter in leisurely manner and to stroll calmly to the door, to see the horses put to.

And then, all being ready, they are off again. "Let 'em go, Dick!" says the coachman, and the ostlers fly back, drawing off the horse-cloths like lightning. Along the High Street goes the "Tally-Ho," with passing glimpses into first-floor windows, where the burgesses are seen shaving; past shops and private houses, where shopboys are cleaning windows and housemaids doing the steps, and out of the town as the clock strikes eight.

A very pretty glimpse, this, of the "good old times," but the coaches did not always hark away so triumphantly; as, for example, when, on a day in March, 1829, an axle of the celebrated "Wonder" coach broke in Towcester street, and the unfortunate coachman was killed in the inevitable upset. The hilly eight miles or so between Towcester and Weedon Beck witnessed many thrilling escapades in the

coaching sort. One eminence, rejoicing in the name of Dirt House Hill, was the scene of a violent collision, in which the Holyhead Mail and the Manchester Mail came into disastrous contact, June 29th, 1838. It was one of the closing smashes of the Coaching Age. Here is the official account :—

"Both coaches were in fault. The Holyhead coach had no lamps, and the explanation of their absence was that the 28th June was the Coronation Day of our beloved Queen, and the crowd was so great in Birmingham that, in paying attention to getting the horses through the streets, and having lost considerable time in so doing, in the hurry to get the coach off again the guard did not ascertain if the lamps were with the coach, or not. The Manchester coach, at the time of the accident, was attempting, when climbing the hill, to pass the Carlisle Mail, and was ascending on the wrong side of the road. The horses dashed into each other, with the result that one of the wheelers of the Holyhead Mail, belonging to Mr. Wilson, of Daventry, was killed, and the others injured, one seriously. The harness was old and snapped like chips, or more serious would have been the consequences; and had not the horse killed been old and worn out, the sudden concussion would have been more violent, and might have deprived the passengers of life. As it was difficult to decide which of the two coachmen was most in the wrong, it

was left to the two coachmasters to arrange affairs between themselves.

In Telford's reports mention is made of no fewer than seven hills cut down and hollows filled on this stretch of road, with an aggregate length of cutting and embanking of two and a half miles. Yet, even so, this remains the most trying part of the route; so much so, that the two hillsides past Foster's Booth are laid with granite kerbs for the purpose of easing the pull-up for horses drawing heavy-laden waggons. The place oddly named Foster's or Forster's Booth is said, on the authority of Pennant, to have derived that title from a wayside booth established by "one Forster, a poor countryman." It grew at length into a scattered street of houses and carrier's inns, and so remains.

Stowe Hill, the last of this hunchbacked company leading to Weedon, acquires its name from the village of Stowe-Nine-Churches, whose scattered houses and *one* church lie on the hill-top, hid from the road by lanes and windy coppices. The title of "Nine Churches" is rather lamely said to arise from nine benefices having been included in the lordship of the manor in ancient times, but a much more picturesque origin is found in the legend of the triumphant diabolism that foiled eight previous attempts to erect the church on other sites. Every night, the stones of the eight ill-fated buildings set up in the daytime were

removed by a mysterious shape "summat bigger nor a hog," but the existing church, the ninth, was suffered to grow to completion. As it is of Saxon origin, this fearful legend itself perhaps goes back to that superstitious time.

Stowe Church is remarkable for the fine monuments it contains: those of Sir Gerald de l'Isle, about 1250; Lady Carey, 1630; and Dr. Turner, 1714. The first is the Purbeck marble effigy of a cross-legged knight, shield on arm, and clad in chain-mail. That of Lady Carey, "the most elegant," says Pennant, "that this or any other kingdom can boast of," is a white marble sleeping figure raised on a black and white marble altar-tomb. This beautiful work of Renaissance art was by the "Master Mason" of James I. and Charles I.—Nicholas Stone, who executed it and set it up here "for my Lady," as he says in his still-existing correspondence, ten years before her death; "for the which," he adds, "I had £220." Although of the most delicate workmanship, it remains, strange to say, in perfect preservation; even the sharp beak of the very savage-looking griffin at the foot of the effigy quite uninjured.

The monument to Dr. Turner, who does not lie here, but at Oxford, where he was President of Corpus Christi College, is a huge mass, occupying a great wall space. He was a non-juring pluralist, who, unlike his brother non-jurors, held successfully to what he had gotten. An

effigy of him, very wiggy and gowny, stands in midst of alcoves, scrolls, and volutes, representing him, like some reverend acrobat, standing on a globe and holding a book in his hand. Religion, beside him, offers a cross and a temple, which he seems disinclined to take, and an all-seeing eye—like that blood-freezing eye in Martin's "Belshazzar's Feast"—radiates down upon the group.

XXVIII

One mile from Weedon and halfway down Stowe Hill, a broad vale opens to the view, the London and North-Western Railway shooting out below from Stowe Hill Tunnel, with the Grand Junction Canal and the river Nen in close company. Weedon Beck is seen while yet a great way off, its neighbourhood fixed by an immense ugly block of yellow brick buildings on a distant hillside. Nearing the place, these are found to be the officers' quarters of Weedon Barracks; but before that fact is ascertained the stranger occupies the time between first glimpsing them and arriving at the spot in speculating whether the hideous pile forms a lunatic asylum, a workhouse, an infirmary, or a prison. Weedon, in fact, is a large military depôt, originally established for the Ordnance Department in 1803. Its situa-

tion here is due to one of the periodical scares with which the fear of foreign invasion afflicts nervous Governments once in every half-century or so. The scare that produced Weedon Barracks, among other odd things, was a particularly severe and craven one, for it assumed our being unable to hold our own upon the sea-coast and in the capital, and selected this site as being as nearly as possible in the centre of England, and the safest place for retiring to in the event of a sudden descent upon our shores. So great was the national terror of "Boney" a hundred years ago! Even the needs of the Court were not forgotten, and a pavilion was provided for the use of George III. over against the time when it should be necessary to flee from Windsor Castle!

The name of Weedon "Beck" might not unreasonably be supposed to derive its second half from the river Nen, that ripples not unpicturesquely through the village, were it not that it has clearly been proved an ancient manor of the Abbey of Bec, in Normandy. When Leland was pursuing his antiquarian studies through England, in the time of Henry VIII., he found it "a praty thoroughfare, sette on a playne grounde, and much celebrated by cariars, bycause it stondeth hard by the famose way there comunely caullid of the people Watheling Street." It became a very busy place in coaching times, and was then chiefly a street of inns. What would have become of Weedon

had the military depôt not been placed here to keep it alive before the railway came, with the thoroughness of a new besom, to sweep the long road clear of traffic from end to end, goodness only knows. There is a Providence that shapes the ends of even old thoroughfare villages; and undoubtedly Weedon believes in the beneficence of that Providence, because, taking away with one hand, it has given double with the other: that is to say, it has a railway junction and a canal, so that when the officers become bored to death in their ugly quarters they can either drown themselves in the canal, or take leave of absence and train to some more lively spot. A third course is to enjoy the billiards and society that the hotels of Weedon afford, or the pleasures of the Grafton Hunt. Those hotels, chiefly of the old coaching type, have all been restored and added to of recent years, and a very large modern one, the "Globe," taking the name of the old and extinct "Globe" half a mile onward, has been built at that spot where the Holyhead Road and the Watling Street part company for some seventy-three miles: a spot quaintly called by Ogilby, in 1675, "Cross o' th' Hand." The "White Hart" stands next door, and opposite glares the "Red Lion"; while the "New" inn —new in 1740, as a tablet over its doorway tells—is trebled in size by two modern wings. "Cash Stores" spell modernity, and the imposing branch of a Northamptonshire bank speaks of business. In contrast with all this,

the old "Bull" inn, situated on the left hand, at the entrance to the village, is now a farm-house, and the road by which the carriages and postchaises came to it off the turnpike, though still traceable, has long been stopped at either end.

There is a great deal more of Weedon than the hurried traveller along the Holyhead Road would suspect. It lies down the turning by this same old house and on the other side of the parallel embankments of railway and canal; embankments so tall that they succeed in completely hiding all but the upper stage of Weedon Church tower. "Here," says that tower, "is Weedon"; and there it is; barracks like model lodging-houses, with children playing and clothes drying upon tier over tier of balconies; women fresh from the washtub, with arms akimbo and rolled-up sleeves, voluble in the entries; and soldiers "married on the strength," slatternly and listless, at the windows: all very domestic and inglorious. The everyday aspect of the barracks is not inspiring. Only occasionally, when on the neighbouring hill-sides a sabre-scabbard flashes by chance in the sun, and the eye thus startled discovers some leisurely horseman scouting, visible to all the world, is the military view of Weedon productive of a thrill.

Many soldiers lie in the crowded churchyard round the ugly church, jammed in an angle between railway and canal: the trains rushing by on a lofty viaduct that looks down upon the damp, sunless and melancholy wedge of land.

Among those soldiers lies "Charles Lockitt, who died August 27th, 1877, in the fifty-third year of his age. Deceased was formerly a sergeant in the 97th Regiment, and was present at the storming of the Redan before Sebastopol, September 8th, 1855, where he was severely wounded, from the effects of which he died."

A much older, and somewhat curious epitaph, is that to "Alice Old, widow, who lived in ye reigne of Queen Elizabeth, in ye reigne of Kinge James ye 1st, in ye reigne of Kinge Charles ye 1st and Kinge Charles ye 2nd, and Kinge James ye 2nd, and deseased ye Second Day of Jany., ye 3rd year of ye reigne of Kinge William and Queen Mary, 1691."

XXIX

No wild geese, according to an ancient fable, ever again spoiled the cornfields of Weedon after they had once been banished by the miraculously successful prayers of the Princess Werburgh, a holy daughter of Wulfere, King of Mercia, somewhere about A.D. 780 That pious lady, afterwards raised to the hierarchy of saints, was abbess of a religious house here. Her steward assembled the birds: the abbess commanded them to depart, and they immediately took wing, but refused to leave the neighbourhood until a missing one of the

flock (killed, cooked and eaten, as it happened) was restored to them. Nothing easier than this to a Saxon saint, and the bird was restored alive to his friends and relations! "The vulgar superstition," says an old writer, "now observes that no wild geese are ever seen to settle and graze in Weedon field." Nor in any other field nowadays, it may be added, in this modern England of ours.

At Weedon the old Watling Street bids goodbye to the Holyhead Road for 71½ miles, and goes by itself in a route 75¼ miles long, rejoining the modern road at Ketley, near Wellington.

The meaning of the name "Watling Street" is sought under many difficulties, so many and so hazy are the derivations of it advanced. The Britons, it is said, knew the rough track crossing the island before the Romans came as the Sarn Gwyddelin, or Foreigners' Road, along whose uncertain course came and went the Phœnician merchants who traded with Britain long before Cæsar had heard of this lonely isle; long, indeed, before he was born. According to Stewkeley, the name "Gwyddelin" stood for "wild men," and this therefore was the Wild Men's Road; the savages so named being the wild Irishmen from across St. George's Channel. Camden and others boldly say the Romans named the road Via Vitellianus, or Vitelliana, an easy Latin modification of "Gwyddelin," the name by which they heard the Britons call it. At any rate, it is to the Romans that its transformation from a mere forest track to a broad, well-engineered, and

well-paved road was due. The work was not soon done, but when completed it took rank among the greatest of military ways.

The Romans engineered the road and did the skilled work; the Britons performed the carrying and the hard labour, forced to it by a thousand stripes and indignities. To them fell the clearing of the woods along the route, and the digging of earth and stone, and to Roman workmen the staking out of the way and the weaving together of those brushwood wattles that compacted the foundations in moist and boggy places. Some fanciful commentators find in those wattles the source of the name given to the road. Completed at length as a military necessity, and with much pagan ceremony committed to the care of the Lares Viales and the less supernatural custody of the road-surveyors, the Via Vitelliana was for over three hundred years a crowded highway, with busy towns and villages along its course; the palatial villas of wealthy Roman citizens peeping out from sheltered nooks. Then came disaster. The Roman garrisons withdrawn, successive waves of savage invasions wrecked the civilisation of that time, and only the burnt walls of towns and settlements remained to tell of what had been. It was not until another four hundred years had passed that the fierce Saxons, becoming tamed, began to rear a civilisation of their own. To this great road they gave, according to that monkish chronicler, Roger de Hoveden, the name "Waetlinga-street, the Way of the Sons of Waetla, a legendary king; and the

Celtic British whom they found in the country, talking what was to them a strange and uncouth tongue, they called, with all the arrogance imaginable, "Wealas," or strangers, forgetting that they themselves were the strangers and the others upon their native soil. But as "Wealas" they remained, and as such they are still, for from that word sprang the name of the Welsh people, who as a matter of fact, style themselves "Cymru."

A curious point to be noted is that this is by no means the only "Watling Street." The name is found repeatedly in this country, applied locally to ancient Roman roads; but *the* Watling Street prominent above all others is this great way, which traversed Britain from its extreme south-eastern verge, over against Gaul, diagonally in a north-westerly direction for 340 miles, until it touched the sea at Carnarvon and Chester. From the three great fortified starting-points at *Dubris*, *Portus Lemanis*, and *Portus Rutupis*—severally identified with Dover, Lympne, and Richborough—it ran in triplicate to Canterbury, and thence, chiefly along the existing Dover Road, to London. By way of that thoroughfare still known as Watling Street, it traversed the City and emerged at Newgate through the city wall, and so into what were then swampy wildernesses on the line of the present Holborn and Oxford Street. At the Marble Arch it turned abruptly to the right, and thence went in a straight line along the course of the

Edgware Road to the great city of *Verulamium*, adjoining the St. Albans of our own day.

From this point the Watling Street and the Holyhead Road are practically identical so far as Weedon Beck. Dunstable marks the site of the Roman market-town of *Forum Dianæ*, or *Durocobrivæ*, as it was also named; and Stony Stratford by its name proclaims its situation on the old route. It was the Roman "*Magiovintum*." Towcester was the "*Lactodorum*" of the Itinerary. At Weedon the ancient road and the modern part company for 71½ miles, to meet again at Ketley railway-station, between Oakengates and Wellington.

XXX

It is this stretch of 75¼ miles that will now be explored. Bid farewell, traveller who would trace the Roman way, to the company of your fellow-men, for this is no frequented route, and towns and villages are few along its course. It begins by climbing out of Weedon and up to a gate, where those who will may trace it across a field. For those others who will not, an ancient divergence, forming a kind of elbow, preserves the continuity of roadway and brings the route over the Grand Junction Canal to Welford Station and Watford Gap, where the

old route of the London and Coventry coach from Northampton to Hillmorton and Coventry, travelled by Dugdale in the seventeenth century, crosses this Roman way. The "New Inn" mentioned by him still stands here, but is now a farmhouse. The name of "Gap," as applied to cross-roads, is very ancient. Curiously enough, a "Watford Gap" is to be found in Staffordshire, on the Birmingham and Lichfield Road.

Few houses are glimpsed in these first nine miles of the Watling Street. At a grim crossing of two high roads near Crick station, but with an appearance as solitary as though many miles remote from villages or railways, it suddenly ends, or continues only as a formidably rugged, grass-grown track. Here the explorer either finds himself daunted, or proves his mettle by plunging boldly forward, reckless of what may betide. For one thing, the telegraph-poles are faithful to the track, and where they lead who shall fear to follow? They conduct, in fact, steadily downhill along this green alley, and in a mile and a half, crossing two fields, bring one out to a flat and low-lying country, and to what the country-folk call the "hard road" again. Three miles of this, and a rise, with a cross-road to the right, leads to Dove Bridge, spanning the Warwickshire Avon. All around, here, there, and everywhere—at Lilbourne, Catthorpe, and Cave's Inn—are speculative sites of the Roman station of *Tripontium*. For the last three miles the Watling Street has formed the boundary

between Northants and Warwickshire, and henceforward, for eighteen miles more, it performs the same office for Warwickshire and Leicestershire. On the Leicestershire side, where the ground rises steeply beyond the little river, is a mysterious mound, called by the villagers of Lilbourne "Castle Hill"—an odd, evidently artificial hill, with two beech trees growing on its summit. Whether it be a Roman *speculum*, or look-out hill, or the grave-mound of some tribal king, ancient even when the Romans

LILBOURNE.

came, who shall say? "Tripontium" was named from three bridges that then crossed the Avon somewhere here, but they and their sites have vanished. Lilbourne itself lies down the right-hand lane, and is a village on the hither hillside, with a very dilapidated church by the little river, and a great huddled mass of grass-grown mounds in the water-meadows opposite. Within sight is the wayside railway station of Lilbourne, incongruous amid these forlorn relics of the past in this out-of-the-way corner of the

country. Let no one think these mounds to be the remains of a Roman camp: they are the only vestiges now left of the once proud Norman castle of Lilbourne.

Uphill, steep and rugged, goes the road to the outlying fringe of Catthorpe, that still continues to be known as "Catthorpe Five Houses," even though they are now, and have long been, but three. From this hill-top the spires and roofs of Rugby are plainly visible by day, and by night the great junction spreads its station and signal-lights in a gorgeous illumination of white, red, and green.

Beyond, in the deep hollow where that latest of great trunk lines, the Great Central Railway, crosses over the road on a blue-brick archway, is "Cave's Inn," an inn no longer. "Cave's Hole" they used to call it in old times, from its situation in this hollow. The lone house was kept in the long ago (that is to say, about 1680) by Edward Cave, grandfather of that Edward who founded the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and was the friend of Johnson. His father, Joseph, was a younger son of the inn-keeping Edward, and, the entail of the family estate being cut off, was reduced to plying the cobbler's trade at Rugby. The literary Edward was born in 1691 at the hamlet of Newton, a short distance off the Watling Street, between this and Catthorpe Five Houses.

It is an obviously Roman way — straight

and uncompromising—that leads onward from Cave's Inn to the cross-roads, at the suggestively lonely spot called "Gibbet," the site in the "good old days" of a gallows-tree originally set up in 1687 for a certain Loseby who had "barbarously murdered" a man named Bunbury, and, being caught almost red-handed, was promptly executed. Nothing is left of "Loseby's Gibbet," as it is marked on old Warwickshire maps. The remains of it, together with the prehistoric tumulus on which it was erected, were swept away when the cross-road from Banbury and Daventry to Lutterworth was made, in 1730. A dense grove of trees at the fork of the roads to Lutterworth and Shawell marks the neighbourhood of the spot.

Beyond this Golgotha, the road dips to the reedy river "Swift"; a lazy little stream and not answerable to its name, as the traveller may see for himself by halting and leaning over Brunsford Bridge. Another solitary stretch conducts to Cross-in-Hand, where there are five roads, two old toll-houses, a modern red-brick cottage, a very fine distant view of Lutterworth church-tower—and not a mortal or immortal body or soul in sight. Ordnance maps mark a "Blackenhall" off to the right, a name that seems to fix the site of the deserted "aula," or country seat, of some Roman notable, whose notability, in the passing of fifteen centuries, has vanished as though he had never been. "Willey Crossing," where

a branch of the Midland Railway bars the cyclist's progress, only serves to emphasise the solitude, and the country girl, who in answer to the summons of the bell, opens the gates, stares at the strange spectacle of a wayfarer. Willey lies somewhere off to the left, but, so far as it affects the road, might be non-existent.

Up the steep road that now lies before the

CROSS-IN-HAND.

explorer, with the little church of Wibtoft peering over a shoulder of the hill on the left, and suddenly you are at High Cross, the famous crossing of the Watling Street and the Fosse Way—the great north-western road of the Romans and their not quite so great way that led out of Somerset through Gloucestershire, the shires of Worcester and Warwick, to Leicestershire and Lincoln.

XXXI

High Cross is among the oddest and most perplexing of places. A multiplicity of roads and sign-posts are gathered together on the hill-top and the traveller, bedevilled with their number, and the shrubberies and the farmyards that

HIGH CROSS MONUMENT.

mask them, is fain to halt and unravel the tangled skein. The Watling Street here slightly changes direction, so that its continuation to Atherstone, ten miles distant, is hidden round an angle. Other roads all round the compass lead, according to the testimony of the signposts, to Rugby, 10 miles; Coventry, 12; Daventry,

18; Lutterworth, 6; and lastly, Leicester, 13 miles. The road to Leicester—the Roman city of *Ratæ*—lies along the Fosse Way, and *that* is now not a road at all, but a meadow, with meadows beyond it; traces of the old way only discoverable by the diligent antiquary. Moreover, the field-gate, padlocked and bristling with the most barbaric of barbed wire, emphasises "no road" and gives the signpost the lie.

High Cross is no misnomer, so far as the adjective goes. It *is* high: very high. Illimitable vales, shading off from green foreground to indigo distance, are unfolded below. Fifty-seven churches are said to be visible from this vantage-point, and goodness only knows how many counties. Fifty-seven churches! Say a hundred and fifty-seven, or more, *if you knew on what particular pin-points in that view to look.*

There is a monument at High Cross, erected in 1712, both to direct travellers in the way they should go and to mark this supposed site of the Roman station of *Vennonæ*. Nowadays the pillar is so completely screened by a little groove of hollies, sycamores, firs, beeches, and laburnums that, although it stands at an angle of the junction, none but those who know exactly where to look are likely to find it. A little wicket-gate leads up to it, in the centre of the grove—a nondescript pile of moulded stones and red-brick, surmounted with what look like fragments of Roman columns. The whole

structure bears the appearance of having been built of architectural fragments retrieved from some early eighteenth-century rubbish heap. It is not improved, nor its Latin inscriptions rendered any clearer, by the countless pocket-knives that have been set to work upon it. High Cross is a lonely place, but its loneliness is belied by this multitude of names and initials, some dating back to 1733.

The story of how this pillar came to be erected here is told in the Proceedings of the Warwickshire justices in the Easter Sessions of 1711. As the Watling Street divides that county and Leicestershire, a conference of the justices of the two shires was called, when it was resolved to "build something memorable in stone" on this site, not only to mark the whereabouts of *Vennonæ* and to direct travellers, but "also for that it was esteemed the centre of England. The cost of this "something memorable" was £83, contributed in equal shares by the two shires. The inscriptions were composed by a Mr. Greenway, a schoolmaster of Coventry. Englished, the principal one runs:—

> Traveller, if you seek the footsteps of the ancient Romans, here you may find them. Hence their most famous military ways, crossing one another, proceed to the utmost limits of Britain. Here the Vennones had their settlement, and at the first mile hence along the street, Claudius, the commander of a cohort, had his camp, and at the same distance along the Fosse, his tomb.

"Cleycester" the Saxons named the deserted Roman camp of *Vennonæ*, that stretched along the road towards Wibtoft. Even yet the whistling ploughman occasionally turns up relics of it, in the form of broken pottery and defaced coins. The tomb of Claudius remained, until quite modern times, along the Fosse Way. It was a tumulus, overgrown with brambles, and known as "Cloudsley Bush." No traces of it are now left.

Ahead, rather more than a mile off the road, the smoky chimneys of Hinckley and Burbage make inky and fantastical wreaths in the sky. Smockington is the name of a hamlet in a bottom, with some reminiscences of a coaching age. Beyond is the "Three Pots" public-house; and again, beyond that, a deserted Primitive Methodist Chapel, standing woe-begone by a canal. Caldecote lies off to the left in another few miles, opposite to the "Royal Red Gate" inn; its name inviting an exploration of the place, for there are those who explain the frequently recurring name of "Caldecote" along the line of Roman roads to mean "cold cot"—a variant of "Coldharbour," that equally common place-name in such situations. The cold cots and the cold harbours had once been, according to this theory, ruined and deserted Roman villas, in whose roofless and chilly recesses the first people who dared to travel after Roman Britain was ravaged by savage tribes took such cold comfort as they might; not daring to light

a warming fire, lest its blaze should bring lurking bandits and murderers to their cheerless refuge.

From this point of view Caldecote is disappointing, for nothing Roman is visible there. It is just a tiny village, with a modernised Hall, and in the Park, less than a stone's throw from the house, the little church. But it is a place with a story; for it was here, on August 28th, 1642, that an attack was made upon the Hall, then the residence of Colonel Purefoy, a noted Republican. The Colonel was at Coventry, and the house in charge of his wife, Dame Joan, and his son-in-law, Master George Abbott, when a raiding-party, said to have been under the command of Prince Rupert, appeared and demanded its surrender. Fortunately the inmates had warning of their approach, and when they would have forced an entrance, the soldiers found doors and windows barred. In the affray that followed, Dame Joan fired first, bringing down her man, and the garrison of men and women servants, headed by Master George, gave so good an account of themselves that the Royalists drew off with a loss of three officers and fifteen soldiers killed. Caldecote Hall was not molested again. Memorials of Dame Joan and Master George still remain in the little church.

XXXII

Beyond Caldecote comes Mancetter—the Roman Manduessedum—on the Warwickshire side, and Witherley, in Leicestershire. Between the two, an earthwork named "Castle Bank," a rectangle measuring six hundred by four hundred feet, seems to have been the site of the Roman camp. Across the road flows the pretty river Anker, with trees densely overhanging it, and framing with their boughs a charming view of Witherley's graceful crocketed spire. Mancetter—how nearly it escaped from being another "Manchester"!—is thought to have derived the first syllable of its name in Roman times from some historic or remarkable stone, "maen," in the British tongue; but, however that may be, no such stone has ever been found. It is now a pretty village, a little distance retired from the road, with a very fine old church, and a churchyard remarkable for its illiterate tombstones and odd epitaphs, from the merely misspelt to the quaintly conceived:—

> Here lies the Wife of Joseph Grew, a Tender Parerent And a Vertious Wife. She died February 1782.

Another, weirdly ungrammatical and savagely cynical, hides the identity of those who lie

beneath by initials, and by the omission of any date :—

HERE LIETH INTERR'D
THE BODY'S OF
H. I. M.

What E're we was or am
it Matters not
To whome related,
or by whome begott.
We was but amnot :
Ask no more of me
'Tis all we are
And all that you must be.

Another, to Sarah and Mary Everitt, 1720, and others of that family, puts a truth in a quaint guise :—

The World is a Caty Full of Crooked Streets
Death is ye Markett plass Whereall must
meet if life Was merchandise That men
Could Buy ye Rich Would Allways live
ye poor must Die.

Purchasable immortality would be a much more potent inducement to become a multi-millionaire than any now existing. But what a terrible thing that would be for the Diamond Kings, the Railway, Oil, Steel, and other monarchs to become immortal. As it is, however, a live tramp has the laugh of a dead millionaire—and a better chance of the Elysian Fields than Dives.

The town of Atherstone, a mile long, breaks the loneliness of Watling Street, half a mile beyond Mancetter. It is chiefly one long street, of the miscellaneous character common to the

small country town: not unpleasing, nor highly interesting. The exit from the town is marked by a railway level crossing, become famous of late years as a source of contention between the local governing body and the London and North-Western Railway. Beyond, the villages of Merevale and Baddesley Ensor are seen to the left; and Dordon, a mushroom growth called into unlovely existence by the new pits of the Hall End Colliery.

"Stony Delph" is the odd name of a village two miles onward, adjoining Wilnecote. It is a name alluding to some quarry, or "stony digging," now forgotten. (Compare, "When Adam *delved* and Eve span.") Wilnecote, down into whose street the road dips from Stony Delph, is a place of brick, tile, and pottery kilns, with a railway-station, formerly called "Two Gates." Where Wilnecote ends and Fazeley begins is not easy to tell, save perhaps by reference to the river Tame, here dividing Warwickshire and Staffordshire. Fazeley has that maritime and Dutch-like appearance belonging to all places settled beside some old canal, and the canal here is one of the oldest, with long rows of wharves and equally long rows of cottages opposite. Both have seen their best days.

Now, good-bye for awhile to level roads, for the Watling Street on entering Staffordshire goes straight for the steepest hill in the neighbourhood, and thereby proves its Roman ancestry. This is the hill leading to Hints. When you

have reached the top, another hill, abrupt and entrenched, with gloomy woods on its brow, scowls down upon it from the left hand. It had a history, without possibility of a doubt, but it has not come down to us; and those who defended and those others who attacked are alike gone to the shores of the Styx, without leaving any other traces save those dumb and reticent earthworks that loom so provokingly mysterious against the sky.

Beyond Weeford, the next landmark, the Watling Street goes straight for three and a half miles, and then brings up against another dead end, where it is crossed by the Lichfield and Birmingham road. A hedge and a ploughed field forbid further progress, and it is only when armed with large-scale maps, and by comparing antiquarian authorities, that the course of the Watling Street can be traced, straight on to Wall. That village is found by following the road to Lichfield until the first left-hand turning is reached, leading, as a steep lane, uphill for a mile. On the hill-top, Wall is found and the Watling Street regained. The tiny village is built over the site of *Etocetum*, of whose ruins some fragments were yet to be seen in Pennant's time, including portions of the ancient Roman wall giving a name to the place. These have long since disappeared, but in 1887 some excavations here laid bare many foundations heaped with the ruins of Roman civilisation, among whose oddments were found roofing-

slates from Bangor and lime from Walsall. If thorough search were made, much more might be brought to light, for this was an important station in those times, situated at the intersection of the Icknield Street with Watling Street. Below the hill, and on the line of the Icknield Street, is the hamlet or farm called Chesterfield—a significant name, telling of Roman relics.

THE WATLING STREET, NEAR HAMMERWICH.

Muckley Corner, beyond Wall, is the meeting-place of roads from Walsall to Lichfield and Wolverhampton. The Watling Street still goes unflinchingly ahead, and reaches the outskirts of Hammerwich, uphill. At that nail-making and coal-mining place, it becomes somewhat confused, but is well-known locally to every man, woman, and child as the "Watling Street Road." Here it has reached a very high-lying

tract, that abomination of desolation called Brownhills. Words are ineffectually employed to describe the hateful, blighted scene; but imagine a wide, dreary stretch of common land, surrounded by the scattered, dirty, and decrepit cottages of a semi-savage population of nail-makers and pitmen, with here and there a school, a woe-begone brick chapel, a tin tabernacle, and a plentiful sprinkling of public-houses. Further, imagine the grass of this wide-spreading common to be as brown, wiry, and innutritious as it is possible for grass to be, and with an extraordinary wealth of scrap-iron, tin-clippings, broken glass, and brickbats deposited over every square yard, and all around it the ghastly refuse-heaps of long-abandoned mines. Finally, clap a railway embankment and station midway across the common, and there you have a dim adumbration of what Brownhills is like.

The Roman road makes a sudden change of direction here, at a point opposite the "Rising Sun," where the old Chester road falls in. It is a change that would be inexplicable, were it not for a strange relic that by chance has survived for sixteen hundred years to explain it. This is a mile's length of deserted road that continues the straight line of Watling Street, and then abruptly ends, as though the Romans had abandoned some contemplated work. It is, as a matter of fact, a monument to the incompetence of the surveyor who had the construction of this division of the Watling Street in his

charge. The several changes of direction taken here and there along the whole length of this great military way—as, for example, at High Cross and Gailey—are explained by the work having been in progress from both ends at once, and the surveys being somewhat inaccurate; but the official entrusted with the road from *Etocetum* seems to have lost his bearings very badly indeed, and to have been road-making at a wide angle from the correct line, when his chief appeared and plotted out the direction afresh from Brownhills.

The road now goes downhill again, past a fine old inn, the "Fleur-de-Lis," and comes to Wyrley Bank, a busy colliery district on the verge of Cannock Chase. Bridgetown, Great Wyrley, and Churchbridge are lumped together in this coal-getting neighbourhood, and the crash of waggons, the shrieking of engines, and coal-dust everywhere bedevil the scene. But, with all these unlovely details, it is far preferable to the stark and hopeless barrennesss of Brownhills.

In little more than two miles this coalfield is quite out of sight and sound, and the road approaches the beautiful old "Four Crosses" inn at Hatherton. Dean Swift is commonly said to have visited this old house on his journeys, and it is quite likely he did, but it could not—for reasons shown elsewhere in these pages *—have been the house where he wrote

* Page 245.

his famous epigram on the landlady. But most accounts continue to give this as the scene, and locally it is firmly believed in.

The old house is of two distinct periods: one dating back to the sixteenth century and exquisite in black oak and white plastered and gabled front; the other probably built about 1710, in a handsome "Queen Anne" style. A curious feature is the Latin couplet carved

THE "FOUR CROSSES," NEAR HATHERTON.

in 1636, on an oak beam outside the older portion of the house:—

> Fleres si scires unum tua tempora me'sem,
> Rides cum non sit forsitan una dies,

which has been translated:

> Brief is your time: a month, perchance,
> Nor even but a day,
> Yet ignorant, poor foolish wight,
> You laughing go your way.

Adjoining is a disused toll-house, and opposite stands another old inn, the "Green Dragon," the group forming a little oasis of settlement in the surrounding desert of lonely road. It was between this and the "Welsh Harp" inn at Stonnal, on the Castle Bromwich road, that the "Shrewsbury Caravan" was halted and robbed on April 30th, 1751, by "a single Highwayman, who behaved very civilly to the Passengers, told them he was a Tradesman in Distress, and hoped they would contribute to his assistance." Whereupon, he handed round his hat and each passenger gave him something, making an involuntary contribution of about £4, "with which he was mighty well satisfied," as indeed he had every reason to be. But he was not so distressed a tradesman that he could condescend to accept coppers, and so "returned some Halfpence to one of them, saying he never took Copper." After this, informing his victims that there were two other "collectors" on the road (were they also Distressed Tradesmen?) he rode with the Caravan for some distance, until it was out of danger and he almost in it, when he left with much courtesy, begging the passengers that they would not at their next inn mention the affair, nor appear against him should he afterwards be arrested.

XXXIII

The gently undulating stretch of country from "Four Crosses" to "Spread Eagle," once dreaded by the name of Calf Heath, is now under cultivation, and the Watling Street, crossing it, broad and well-kept, wears more the look of a high-road. The spreading lakes seen here and there, known as "Gailey Pools," are reservoirs of the old Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal that presently crosses the road under a hunch-backed bridge and by an old round-house, whose tower stands out prominently for a long distance down the straight perspective. The "Spread Eagle," an old coaching-inn, once gave a name to the adjoining railway station of Gailey, but where the village hides that now serves sponsor to it is not readily discovered. A mile beyond comes the river Penk, crossed at a pretty spot by a substantial stone bridge, and across the meadows by a red-brick one, where a mill-cut froths and foams, and a cheerful old mill and farmhouse stand. On the other side of the river is the hamlet of Horsebrook, with Stretton down a side lane, supposed to have been the *Pennocrucium* — the crossing of the Penk — of Roman times.

The ubiquitous Thomas Telford is recalled to mind at a little distance onward by his name in cast-iron on the aqueduct of the Birmingham

and Liverpool Canal. Near by is another reservoir, rejoicing in the name of "Stinking Lake." At that fine old inn, the "Bradford Arms," Ivetsey Bank, the left-hand road leads in less than two miles to Boscobel, one of the most famous places in our history, for to that hunting-lodge in the forests then thickly overspreading this part of the country came Charles II. in 1651, as a hunted fugitive, after the disastrous defeat at Worcester. Boscobel had been built seventy years before, by the Giffards of Chillington, ostensibly as a hunting-lodge where their guests might rest in the intervals of the chase, and in a sense it was so used, with officers of the law for hunters, and fleeting Papists as quarry; but in the other sense it was a very transparent pretence, when we consider that the family residence at Chillington Hall stands not more than a mile away. For many years it had been used as a refuge for recusant Roman Catholic priests, at a time when that religion was proscribed; for the Giffards were then, as they are still, of that faith, and so were the yeomen Penderels who occupied the house. It was built, too, under the direction of a Jesuit lay-brother, one Nicholas Owen, or "Little John" as his intimates called him, a skilful deviser of priest's-holes and such like hiding-places under stairways or in the recesses of panellings. No Roman Catholic gentleman's house was at that time considered to be complete without some

of "Little John's" darkling hutches and inconveniently cramped nooks secreted somewhere between foundation and roof. Truth to tell, however, these supposedly "secret" places are fairly obvious, and, given a search-party convinced that the fugitive was somewhere near, they must have been dull-witted fellows who did not light upon them.

When Worcester Fight ended so badly for "the man Charles Stuart, that Son of Belial," as the Republicans were pleased to call Charles II., he made at once for Boscobel, the place where, only a few days before, the Earl of Derby had secreted himself. Accompanied by Colonel Carless, he threw himself upon the assured loyalty of the five Penderel brothers and their widowed mother, Dame Joan, who then lived here and at ruined Whiteladies Priory, half a mile away. "Will Jones," for that was the name he adopted, could have found no more loyal hearts had he searched the realm, and the Penderels had already found the transition from secreting priests to Royalist fugitives an easy one. But Boscobel had become suspect, and the quarry was now so important that rigorous search was made, and Charles and Carless, although hid respectively in the secret recess behind the panelling in the Squire's room, and in the pit beneath the cheese-loft during the night, were in daytime for greater security secreted in the bushy head of a pollard oak growing in a meadow near the house: the

tree afterwards famous as the "Royal Oak." In that leafy refuge Charles slept, with his head in the faithful Colonel's lap, and beneath them quested the search-party of Cromwell's dragoons. The story is well known, how that tree effectually concealed them, and how, after many wanderings, the King fled the country from the sea shore at Brighthelmstone.

The original Royal Oak is gone; hacked to

BOSCOBEL AND THE "ROYAL OAK."

pieces for mementoes in a very short while after the Restoration, and the youthful oak that stands solitary in a field does but mark the spot. But the house stands still, with its old hiding-places, and many are those who come to see; so that the pile of visitors' books, all closely filled, is a mighty and a growing one. Of the "bosco bello," the Fair Wood that gave the old house its name, not a trace remains.

Downhill from Ivetsey Bank, the Watling

Street presently crosses into Shropshire, and comes to the village of Weston-under-Lizard—or "Weston-subter-Liziard" as it was formerly named—a cheerful little place, clinging like some feudal dependant to the park and Hall, the seat of the Earl of Bradford. The church and mansion stand adjoining, at the end of a short drive: in the church the cross-legged effigies of Sir Hugh and Sir Hamo de Weston, who flourished six or seven hundred years ago; and in the exquisitely fitted Bradford Chapel memorials of that family.

Burlington Pool, a reedy lake on the right hand, is now passed, and Crackley Bank, leading down-hill towards another scene of industry and coal-mining, seen from afar by reason of its smoky skies. Close by, at the place called Red Hill, the Roman station of *Uxaconium* was placed.

Before the pits and furnaces of the Lilleshall, Oakengates, and Ketley coal and iron mines are reached, the long street of St. George's has to be passed through. There was a time, not so long since, when this was merely the hamlet of "Pain's Lane," and its local makeshift place of worship simply "Pain's Lane Chapel." All this is changed, and though its old prosperity has abated, the place now possesses a fine Gothic church dedicated to St. George, and has changed its name to match. Oakengates also has seen its best days, for many of the mines are exhausted. In these

latter circumstances, the neat little houses of "Perseverance Place, 1848," and others with similarly virtuous titles, look not a little pathetic. Perseverance, indulged in continually, has stripped the district of its mineral wealth, and the miners, living like maggots in a cheese, have eaten their home away. The township, at the very bottom of a steep descent, is busy, but dirty and slatternly, with a railway station and level crossing, and huge cinder heaps, likening it to some domestic dustbin in Brobdingnag. Ascending out of it, Ketley is reached, and with it the junction of Watling Street with the Holyhead Road.

XXXIV

And now to resume, at Weedon, the modern road. It is a tiring pull up out of Weedon, on the way to Daventry, and anything that may excuse a rest is welcome. That excuse is found in the contemplation of a substantial stone-built farmhouse, with nine windows in a row, half a mile out of the village, on the right of the road, and fronted at this day with a pleasant garden. This, now called the "Grange," was formerly the "Globe" coaching and posting inn. Beyond it, opposite a group of Georgian red-brick wayside houses, the old road goes

over what used to be a water-splash in the deep hollow; but Telford's road proceeds inflexibly onward. The church in the meads to the right is that of Dodford, the name of the water-splash aforesaid. As for the derivation of that name, Fuller, with some hesitancy, gives "'Dods',' water-weeds, commonly called by children 'cat's-tails,' growing thereabouts."

The rough cart-track by which alone Dodford Church is reached, and the unusual jealousy that keeps the building locked, combine to hide much of interest from all wayfarers, save those of the most determined type. The enterprising and energetic who prevail have their reward, for the interior—good Early English and Decorated—has an unusually interesting collection of monuments. Here, cross-legged and mail-clad, lies the effigy of Sir William Keynes, one of the last of his family, settled here—no, *not* settled, because they were continually away, warring for kings or against kings; rather let us say, who owned this manor—from the Conqueror's time until that of Edward III., when the name was extinguished in the marriage of an heiress, the last representative. The true significance of the crossed legs of these old knights is still in dispute, but the commonly received idea is that the attitude proclaims a Crusader. But it is scarce possible that Sir William de Keynes (who died in 1344) ever fought for the Cross in Palestine. Had he done so, he must have been, in two senses, an

infant in arms, for the Crusades were over and done with, and the Soldan had got his own again (or what was as good as his own) before William could have relinquished his coral and bells and taken to mace and broadsword. The fact seems to be that the early Crusaders, who adopted this mortuary symbolism, were followed in it by many who had never warred against the Infidel at all, and debased the original significance into a mere fashion.

Two others of the family are represented here in effigies of women, thought to be Hawisa de Keynes (1330) and her great-granddaughter, Wentiliana (1376). The earliest of the two is wooden, and is represented in the nun-like head-dress of her time.

But the finest monument is that of Sir John Cressy, who died in 1444, across the seas in Lorraine, in the service of Henry VI. He is represented in plate-armour, and wears the Lancastrian badge, the Collar of SS. On the breastplate of the effigy is carved, very bold and deep, "John Newell 1601." Who John Newell was, except that he thus proves himself of the great 'Arry family, it is hopeless to inquire. "I.A. 1776" has also proved on the alabaster the barbarism of his nature and the mettle of his penknife.

Besides these memorials, the church has numerous brasses and tablets, while in the churchyard a stone tells of a Major Campbell, commanding the Royal Artillery at Weedon,

who died in 1809, after having lived "strictly fulfilling the duties of the Soldier, Gentleman, and Christian: not less lamented in death than valued in life." In conclusion, an odd custom prevailing here and in surrounding villages may be noticed: epitaphs on stones erected by widows over their husbands giving the relationship, "the husband of." So complete a reversal of the usual practice, placing the man in the subsidiary place, is a novelty.

The remainder of the way to Daventry, or "Daintry," as old travellers always called it, is hilly, but beautifully shaded by hedgerow trees. Hills and vales in constant alternation are seen on either hand; the frowning bulk of Borough Hill on the right, crowned with British earthworks, converted by the Romans into a military camp, probably identical with the lost station of *Beneventa*. Roman remains have been discovered up there in great numbers in days before the hill became enclosed, cultivated, and hedged about with difficulties in the way of exploring antiquaries. Down below, and near the road, is the ruin-strewn field called "Burnt Walls," known by that name at least six hundred and fifty years ago, when it is mentioned as "ad brende walles" in a deed relating to property. On the eastern side of Borough Hill, near the village of Norton, and adjoining the Watling Street, another field, oddly named "Great Shawney," has yielded many traces of old Rome. The name, indeed, is thought to be a faint and

far echo of *Isannavaria*, another vanished Roman camp.

It was on Borough Hill that Charles I.'s army of ten thousand men, on a night in June, 1645, set a seventeenth-century example to the eighteenth-century ten thousand under the "brave old Duke of York," who were marched to the top of a hill and then marched down again, as a well-known rhyme tells us. Nothing happened on either occasion. Charles's troops, occupying Daventry and the surrounding villages for some days before, were frightened to that night's hill-top vigil by some skirmishing exploits on the part of Fairfax. Before morning came, they descended and went off in retreat to Naseby, the King with them, reluctant to leave the comfortable lodgings he had enjoyed for six nights past at the "Wheatsheaf."

XXXV

The first prominent object on approaching the town is the "Wheatsheaf" itself, boasting of being established in 1610, but rebuilt in the coaching age, and just a white-painted, stucco-fronted building with a courtyard and a general Pickwickian and respectable Early Victorian air. Opposite stands an "Independent Chapel, erected 1722," which, with its secular air and big gates,

looks like a converted inn. Continuing along the narrow and unpicturesque Sheaf Street thus entered, the unwary pilgrim, unobservant on wheels, is downhill at the other end and out of the town in the proverbial "jiffy," or the not less proverbial "two-twos." But Sheaf Street, lining the Holyhead Road, is a snare and a delusion. *That* does not form the sum and substance of Daventry, sprawling largely down a street to the right and developing itself astonishingly at the end in a mutton-chop-shaped market-place, continued to the left hand again as a High Street. It is as though Daventry had long ago resolved to keep itself retired and select from the throng that once went up and down the Holyhead Road; and very quiet and empty the market-place looks to this day, with a church rebuilt in 1752 and supposed to be Doric: the exterior in a yellow sandstone rapidly crumbling away, and the interior like a concert-hall. The eye lights upon only one memorable thing, and that an epitaph to a certain Susanna Pritchett Godson, who died in 1809, aged twenty-five:—

> She was——
> But room won't let me tell you what.
> Name what a Wife should be,
> And She was that.

Daventry Priory once stood hereby, but many years have passed since its last fragments were cleared away to provide a site for the town gaol in front of this ugly church. The Priory

DAVENTRY MARKET-PLACE.

itself was, with others, suppressed by Wolsey, that ambitious Cardinal, for the purpose of seizing its funds, towards the endowment of his colleges at Oxford and Ipswich. He is charged with having sent five of his creatures to pick a quarrel with the house, and, causing the dispute to be referred to himself, of having dissolved it by fraud. The story of what happened to his five emissaries and himself, and the moral drawn from their fate, are quite in keeping with the superstitious spirit of those times. Thus, one learns that two of the five quarrelled, and one slew the other, the survivor being hanged; that a third drowned himself in a well; that a fourth, formerly well-to-do, became penniless and begged till his dying day; and that the remaining one "was cruelly maimed in Ireland." This series of "judgments" is then carried on to the Cardinal, whose miserable end is historic; to his colleges, of which one was immediately pulled down, and the other finished under other patronage; and to the Pope who permitted Wolsey's high-handed doings, and who was besieged and long imprisoned. Unhappily, for the sake of a poetic completeness of vengeance, Henry VIII.—who dissolved more religious houses than any one, and, moreover, appropriated their revenues and lands to his own uses—flourished amazingly for years afterwards. Like the wicked whose good fortunes are bitterly lamented by the Psalmist, his eyes swelled out with fatness, and he was well filled.

The old pronunciation of "Daintry" goes back certainly to the sixteenth century, when it was probably responsible for the device of the old town seal, adopted at that time, representing a figure intended to picture a Dane at odds with an indeterminate kind of a tree. Pennant, on the other hand, derives the name from "Dwy—avon—tre," "the dwelling of the two Avons": and indeed the town is placed, as it

TOWN SEAL, DAVENTRY.

were, at the fork of the Nen, sometimes called the Avon, and another insignificant stream; but this is looked upon with an almost equal contempt, and mystery still enshrouds the real origin and the significance of the name.

Whips were made at Daventry a hundred years ago, but it is now a boot-making town, not altogether unpicturesque, in the slatternly sort. Besides its "Wheatsheaf," there are the "Peacock," the "Dun Cow," the "Bear," and

the "Saracen's Head"—all old; but the palm must be given to the last, containing much black oak, and altogether a great deal more interesting than a casual glance at its commonplace plastered front would disclose. Its courtyard is especially quaint; in red brick, with a large building to one side, now practically disused, but once the busy dining-room of the coaches. It was built probably about 1780: the

BRAUNSTON HILL.

upper part ornamented with grotesque wooden figures of Jacobean date, evidently the spoils of some demolished building. The whole, overhung with grape-vines, makes a very pretty picture.

One leaves Daventry steeply down hill, through a trampish, out-at-elbows, dirty-children-wallowing-in-the-dust-in-the-middle-of-the-road quarter. Hills again rise to left and right: on the left Catesby Abbey; ahead, the exceedingly steep

descent of a mile down Braunston Hill, with Braunston spire, a deserted and ruinated windmill, and leagues upon leagues of distant country, unfolded to the startled eye. The "steep and dangerous descent" was to have been improved by Telford, but the design was never put into

BRAUNSTON.

execution, and the hill still owns those defects, and hurtling motor-cars and cycles descending at extravagant speeds alarm the propriety of the neighbourhood. In the hollow, 197 feet below the hill-top, stands Braunston Station, the "Old Ship" inn nestling beneath

the thunderous girders of the railway-bridge crossing over the road; and on the next rise over the Oxford Canal, a roadside forge and the "Castle" inn, as old as Queen Elizabeth's day. Here the rising road forks, presenting a puzzle to the stranger, for either has the appearance of a high road. The Holyhead Road, however, bears to the left, that to the right leading in an outrageously steep semi-circle to the long, rustic, stone-built street of Braunston village.

The tower and spire of the fine Decorated church are imposing, but the interior is of little interest—the body of the building, reconstructed some fifty years ago, swept and garnished, and cleared of everything but one old relic: the mail-clad effigy of a splay-footed crusading knight, in the act of violently drawing his sword, thrust in an unobtrusive corner.

XXXVI

Two-and-a-half miles from this point, across country and in the angle formed by the branching of the Watling Street and the Holyhead Road from Weedon, lie the village and the romantic manor-house of Ashby St. Ledgers, the home of Robert Catesby, chief conspirator in the Gunpowder Plot. From Braunston is by

no means the best way to Ashby: reached by a long, steep lane, and across six fields and two cross-roads. The only guides on this solitary way are the traveller's bump of location and a battered sign-post in a cross-road, on one of whose decrepit arms, pointing vaguely through an impenetrable hedge into a ploughed field, the words, "To Ashby St. Ledgers and Crick Station," can, under favouring circumstances of sunshine, be faintly spelled. A meditative rook, perching on a deserted harrow, typical of solitude, seemed, when the present historian came this way, to hold and keep the secret of the route, only discovered by diligent scouting at the next field-gate.

But Ashby St. Ledgers is worth this effort. At the end of the rather uninteresting village, and closing the view, there suddenly comes the beautiful grouping of old church, gate-house, and ancient trees, leading to the manor-house itself, glimpsed through the gate—a fine old Elizabethan house, a picturesque pile of terraces, oriel windows and gables, weather-stained and delightfully picturing the orthodox character of a conspirator's home.

They still show the "Gunpowder Plot Room" over the gateway, and the memorials of Catesby's ancestors can even now be seen in the church—that Church of St. Leodegarius from whom the place derives its name. There they lie on the floor; monumental brasses of Catesbys, with their cognizance, a black lion, conspicuous where

the fury of centuries ago has not hacked the workmanship out of recognition. There lie Sir William Catesby, 1470, and his son, Sir William, taken prisoner at Bosworth Field fifteen years later, *ex parte* Richard III., and beheaded at Leicester; great-great-great-grandfather of the conspirator, Robert, and a warning, had he

ASHBY ST. LEDGERS.

lent an ear to the history of his family, against too rashly entering into the bloody politics of those times. That remote ancestor's fate carried with it the forfeiture of his estates, soon restored to his son; but when Robert Catesby fell in his attempt to destroy King and Parliament, and to subvert the Protestant religion, the property, forfeited again, was never restored.

XXXVII

Retracing our steps to the Holyhead Road again, the "dumpling hills of Northamptonshire," as Horace Walpole calls them, give place to the long Warwickshire levels. Four miles and a half from Daventry, and just before reaching Willoughby village, lying off the road, the Great Central Railway comes from Rugby, and crosses over on an embankment and a blue-brick-and-iron-girder bridge; a station labelled "Willoughby, for Daventry," looking up and down the road. Does any one, it may be asked, ever alight for Daventry in this solitary road, four miles and a half distant from that town, on the inducement of that notice? And when the innocent traveller has thus alighted, what does he say when he gets his bearings, and finds himself thus marooned, far away from where he would be?

Possibly he resorts, after being thus scurvily tricked by the railway company, to the "Four Crosses" Inn, a house with a history, standing close by. The old inn of that name, demolished in 1898, faced the bye-road to Willoughby village; the new building fronts the highway. The junction of roads at this point has only three arms, hence the original sign of the "Three Crosses," changed to four, according to the received story, at the suggestion of Dean

Swift, who was a frequent traveller along this road between Dublin and London, riding horseback, with one attendant. The old inn, hardly more than a wayside pot-house, was scarce a fit stopping place for that dignitary; but it is well known that Swift delighted in such places and

THE "FOUR CROSSES," WILLOUGHBY (DEMOLISHED 1898).

the odd society to be met in them, and it may have been in some ways more convenient than the usual posting-houses at Daventry and Dunchurch.

The story runs that on one of his journeys, anxious for breakfast and to be off, he could not hurry the landlady, who tartly told him "he must wait, like other people." He waited, of necessity,

but employed the time in writing with his diamond ring upon one of the panes:—

> There are three
> Crosses at your door:
> Hang up your Wife
> And you'l count Four.
>
> Swift, D., 1730.*

The landlord probably did not hang up his wife, but he certainly seems to have altered his sign.

The window-pane disappeared from the old inn very soon afterwards, and it is not at all unlikely that the landlady herself saw to it being removed. Certainly it had disappeared in 1819, when some verses in the *Gentlemen's Magazine* gave the misquotation of those lines that has been the basis of every incorrect rendering since then. Many years ago the late Mr. Cropper, of Rugby, who was a native of Willoughby, and whose father had kept the "Four Crosses," purchased the pane of a cottager in the village. It is of the old diamond shape, of green glass, and bears the words quoted above, scratched in a fine, bold style.

The distinction is wrongly claimed for the "Four Crosses" Inn at Hatherton, near Cannock, on the Watling Street; a very fine old coaching

* The date is worth notice. All who have ever written on Swift give his last visit to England as 1727. But this flatly contradicts them. Nor is it in order to suppose this inscription a forgery, for it exhibits the characteristic handwriting of the Dean, as seen in his manuscript diary at South Kensington.

inn, under whose roof Swift must certainly often have stayed; but as the roads at that point form a complete cross of four arms, the sign must always have been what it is now, and certainly all the evidence points to the Willoughby claim being justified.

Willoughby may on some old maps be found marked as a "spa," and a little handbook, published in 1828, dealing with the merits of the "New Sulphureous and Saline Baths" that stood opposite the "Four Crosses," assured all likely and unlikely scrofulous visitors that the waters were just as unpleasing to taste and smell, and inferentially as efficacious, as those of Harrogate itself. Cropper was both proprietor of the new baths and keeper of the inn, somewhat grandiloquently described as the "principal house for the reception of company." The little shop seen built out from the old "Four Crosses" was a chemist's, added at that hopeful time. But the Willoughby Spa, although so conveniently situated on the great road, never attracted much custom, and is now quite forgot. The chemist gave up in despair, and his shop was in use as a bar-parlour at the last: the old drug drawers, with their abbreviated Latin labels, remaining until the house was pulled down.

Willoughby legends still linger. They tell even yet, of the cross that stood here in the seventeenth century, and of Cromwell's soldiery, retreating from Edge Hill, tying a rope round

the shaft to pull it down, only being dissuaded by the vicar, who diverted their attention with a foaming beer-jug. It is gone now, however, but the date of its disappearance is uncertain. Gone too are the seventeen hundred acres of common land that once belonged to the parish; but their fate is a matter of precise information. They were enclosed in 1758 and the plunder divided, as by law enacted.

There was once a "New Inn" between Willoughby and Dunchurch, but it no longer tempts the wayfarer; just as there was a toll-gate at Woolscot, not far beyond, that no longer takes tolls. The toll-house remains, as do certain legends of the ways of Rugby boys with the pikeman; boys and man alike long since ferried across the inky Styx by the grim boatmen.

Pikemen acquired a preternaturally acute memory for faces. It is an acquirement that, with the smile of recognition which costs nothing, makes princes more popular and beloved than the exercise of the most austere virtues. Not that pikemen commonly smiled. Suspicion and malevolence sat squarely on their countenances, and when a something that might by an effort be construed as a smile contorted their countenances, it was like that of an alligator who perceives a fine fat nigger within reach of his jaws. A pikeman who took toll of even a thousand persons in the course of a day, might safely be counted upon to recognise

each on his return and to pass him without the formality of halting to show the ticket issued in the morning; but let one who had not already paid toll that day attempt to pass with the customary nod of the returning traveller, franked through by his morning's payment, and he was certain to be stopped and asked for his ticket. Those were the occasions when the pikeman smiled in his most hateful manner. The only places where this cold-blooded grin of triumph may nowadays be seen off the melodramatic stage, are the Old Bailey and other criminal courts; when prosecuting counsel have forged the last link in a chain of conviction.

It was at Woolscot toll-gate that the pikeman on one occasion was paid twice in one day for a gig. Tom Pinner, a well-known coachman who afterwards kept the "Five Ways" tavern at Birmingham, was once visited at Dunchurch by some friends who set out early from Daventry. They had a pleasant day and wound up with dinner. The feast was good, the wines potent, and the guests slept heavily. As they lay thus, the jocular Pinner blacked their faces, and when they had revived a little started them home. When the gig drew up in the flickering light of the toll-gate, they of course could not find their tickets, and the pikeman insisted on toll being paid: he was quite sure no black men had passed that day!

Passing over the streamlet spanned by Rains

Bridge, which is probably the "stone bridge" referred to by Ogilby in 1675, as situated at the end of the twelve furlongs' length of "Dunchurch Lane, bad way," the exquisite half-mile avenue of majestic elms leading along a gently curving road into Dunchurch is entered. Branches and thick foliage meet overhead and realise the oft-met similitude drawn between cathedral aisles and avenues such as this.

XXXVIII

Dunchurch and the surrounding Dunsmore—at this time tamed somewhat from its ancient wildness and tickled into productiveness and smiling fertility by plough and harrow—were associated, close upon three hundred years ago, with a conspiracy that might well, had it been successful, have added such a page to England's story whose likeness for horror and ferocity it would perhaps be impossible to match. Dunchurch, in short, has a scenic part in the "Gunpowder Treason and Plot," that came near to blowing up King, Lords, and Commons, in Parliament assembled, on the famous Fifth of November, 1605. "To blow the Scottish beggars back to their native mountains" was Guy Fawkes' savagely humorous explanation of the

plot, when asked its object by a Scottish nobleman; but its real aim was the avenging of Roman Catholic wrongs and disabilities upon James I., and the Protestants. We have already seen the home of Robert Catesby, the true and original begetter of the plot: and here, at Dunchurch, was to be assembled a great gathering of Roman Catholic noblemen and gentlemen, to take part in a rising to follow upon the success of the blow to be struck in London. Those were times when assemblages of any kind were looked upon with suspicion, and so it was given out that the great preparations being made along the road from London, in providing relays of horses at every stage, were in connection with an elaborate hunting-party on Dunsmore, to which the squire of Ashby St. Ledgers had bidden the whole country-side. Never doubting the success of their design to blow Parliament sky-high, Catesby with three of his fellow-conspirators, Percy, and John and Christopher Wright, left London for Dunchurch on the eve of the fatal Fifth. Fawkes, fanatically courageous, was in his cellar, under the Parliament House: the sinister figure that close upon three hundred anniversary "Guy Fawkes Days" and innumerable ludicrous "guys" have not wholly succeeded in robbing of its dramatic force. There he lurked: booted and spurred, slouch-hatted and cloaked; slow-matches in his pocket, and a dark-lantern behind the door.

Two others of the conspirators remained in town, to watch the success of the dark design. They were Ambrose Rookwood and Thomas Winter. But as the midnight of November 4th, sounded from the clocks of London and ushered in the opening hour of the Fifth, Fawkes was arrested in his hiding-place, and the scheme wrecked. Instantly, as though by magic, the rumours of some calamity narrowly averted, pervaded London, and warned Rookwood and Winter to fly. Had they trusted to the staunchness of Fawkes they and the others would have been safe enough, for that unwilling sponsor of all subsequent "guys" was as secret as the grave, and even under torture made no disclosures until by their own later acts the conspirators had rendered concealment useless. But, panic-stricken, Rookwood and Winter left London behind in the forenoon; Winter for hiding in Worcestershire, Rookwood to overtake and warn Catesby and his companions on the Holyhead Road. He came up with them at Little Brickhill and with laboured breath—for he had ridden headlong—told the tale of how the plot had been discovered. They wasted no time in discussion. If they had hasted before, they journeyed frantically now. By six o'clock, riding through a day of November rain, they had gained Ashby St. Ledgers, casting away their heavy cloaks as they went, together with aught else that might hinder their mad flight. Seventy-eight miles in seven hours was a mar-

vellous ride in those times, and under such conditions. Perhaps some modern cyclist, eager to draw a parallel, will essay the feat under like meteorological conditions.

That evening, after wild and gloomy conference at Ashby, they set out for Dunchurch, making for the "Lion" inn, the head-quarters of the pretended hunting-party, where the young and handsome Sir Everard Digby was in expectation of hearing other news than that which burst upon him when the exhausted and dispirited band drew rein before the old gabled house in the stormy night. The story of their further flight, of how Catesby and Percy died together in the fighting at Holbeach House, does not concern us here, but the old house does. An inn no longer, it still stands, as a farm-house, in midst of Dunchurch village: a long, low, gabled building, with casement windows and timbered and plastered front; low-ceiled and heavily raftered rooms within. In the rear, beyond the farm-yard, may even yet be seen the remains of a moat, enclosing a wooded patch of ground whose story is vague and formless: relics, these, of times much more ancient than those of the Gunpowder Plot. The "Lion" was an old "pack-horse" inn for many generations afterwards.

Dunchurch, in the old coaching days, was a place of many and good inns: all of them, however, excelled by the "Dun Cow," almost the sole remaining member of the herd of "White Lions,"

"Red Lions," "Blue Boars," "Green Men," and such-like zoological curiosities that once thronged it. There was an excellent reason for such wealth of accommodation, for the village was situated not only on the Holyhead Road, but at the intersection of it by the Oxford and Leicester Road, along which plied a goodly throng of traffic. On that road lies Rugby, three miles away, and along it went, among other forgotten conveyances, the "Regulator" —"young gents calls it the 'Pig and Whistle,'" remarked the guard of the coach that conveyed young Tom Brown from London to Dunchurch.

Rugby and its famous school have made a vast difference to this village, now postally "Dunchurch, near Rugby," but formerly the post-town whence the once insignificant village of Rugby—Rugby-under-Dunchurch was served.

The "Dun Cow," survivor and representative of the jolly days of old, takes its name from the mythical monster of a cow slain, according to confused and contradictory legends, upon Dunsmore by the almost equally mythical Guy of Warwick.

Steadfastly regarding the old inn, and with its back turned upon the church, the white marble effigy of "the Right Honble. Lord John Douglas Montagu Douglas Scott" cuts a ludicrous figure in the centre of the village. The work of an Associate of the Royal Academy, it simply serves to point to what depths the art of sculpture had descended in the early Sixties,

DUNCHURCH.

when it was wrought. The inscription states that Lord Douglas Scott died in 1860, and that the statue "was erected by his tenantry in affectionate memory of him." The clothes worn at that period give, of course, their own element of grotesqueness to the statue; but the heavy mass of fringed drapery that Lord John is represented to be carrying under his arm has

LORD JOHN SCOTT'S STATUE.

occasioned the derisive query, "Who stole the altar-cloth?"

Dunchurch, besides being a sweetly pretty place, rejoices in a number of minor curiosities. The beautiful church has one, in the eccentric monument of Thomas Newcombe, King's Printer in the reigns of Charles II., James II., and William III. It is in the shape of folding-doors of white marble. In the churchyard, too, he who searches in the right place will discover the epitaph of Daniel Goode, who died in 1751,

"A Ged year 25." The advice given is better than the jingle to which it is set:—

To all young men
That me survive
Who dyed at less
Than twenty-five,
I do this Good
Advice declare:
That they live in
God's faith and fear.

Other relics are grouped well in sight of one another. The battered village cross, for instance, with a little marble slab fixed on its shaft, bearing the arms of that Duchess of Buccleuch, who in 1810 restored it; and the village "cage," or lock-up, under a spreading elm, with the stocks close adjoining, for the accommodation or discomfort of two. The lock-up was for the detention of such malefactors as might trouble Dunchurch—the stocks for misdemeanants only. An Act of 1606 imposed six hours of the stocks and a fine of five shillings for drunkenness; and from that time forward and until the opening years of the nineteenth century this peculiar form of punishment was common throughout England. His personal popularity, or the want of it, made all the difference between misery and comparative comfort to the misdemeanant undergoing six hours in the stocks. The jolly toper, overcome in his cups and sent to penance by some Puritan maw-worm of a justice, had both the moral and bodily support of his boon

companions, and left durance probably more drunken than he had been on the occasion that led to his conviction: the sturdy vagrant, smiter, rapscallion, or casual rogue who happened to be in ill-odour with the village endured bitter things. Jibes, stones, cabbage-stalks, ancient eggs, and dead dogs and cats, deceased weeks before, were hurled at the wretch, who was lucky if he had not received severe personal injuries before his time was up, and the beadle or the parish constable came to release him.

XXXIX

It would be difficult nowadays to discover any one to agree with Pennant, the antiquary, who in 1782 could find it possible to write of the superbly wooded road across Dunsmore Heath as a "tedious avenue of elms and firs." The adjective is altogether indefensible. Six miles of smooth and level highway, bordered here by noble pines, and there by equally noble elms, invite the traveller to linger by the roadside from Dunchurch to Ryton-on-Dunsmore. It is a stretch of country not only beautiful but interesting, alike for its history and traditions. The Heath, long since enclosed and under cultivation, but once the haunt of fabled monsters, and, at a later period, of desperate highwaymen, is a level

tract of land dotted with villages that all add to their names the title of "upon-Dunsmore," as a kind of terrific dignity. Through the midst of this sometime wilderness goes the high-road, beautiful always, but singularly lovely in the eyes of the traveller who, advancing in a north-westerly direction, sees the setting sun glaring redly between the wizard arms of the pines.

DUNSMORE AVENUE.

Many of those exquisite trees are of great age. The avenue, in fact—the Ong Avenue, as it was originally called—was planted in 1740, by John, second Duke of Montague. Some of the firs have decayed, but happily their places will be taken in due course by the saplings planted of late years. The elms are, most of them, in worse case, and are being generally cut down

to half their height by cautious road surveyors. The elm, that, without warning, rots at the heart and collapses in a moment, is the most treacherous of trees; and, some day, those that are left here will suddenly fall and be the death of the unhappy cyclist, farmer, or tramp who happens to be passing at the time.

It was here, in 1686, that Jonathan Simpson robbed Lord Delamere of 350 guineas, and "innumerable drovers, pedlars, and market-people," all the way to Barnet. Jonathan was executed the followed September, aged thirty-two.

Two famous posting-houses once stood beside this lonely road: the "Blue Boar" and the "Black Dog." Both have retired into private life. The old "Blue Boar," still giving the name of "Blue Boar Corner" to the cross-roads, two miles out from Dunchurch, is a square building of white-painted brick, and stands on the left hand, with a garden where the coach-drive used to be. It must have been especially welcome to travellers in the dreadful snowstorm of December, 1836, when no fewer than seventeen coaches were snowed up on the Heath, near a spot named, appropriately enough, "Cold Comfort."

This also was the "lonely spot, with trees on either side for six miles," where the "Eclipse" coach, on its way from Birmingham to London, was overpowered by convicts on a day in November, 1829. It seems that, on the day before this occurrence, the deputy-governor of Chester Gaol

and two warders, in charge of twelve convicts, chained and locked together in twos by padlocks, had set out from Birkenhead for London by the "Albion" coach, and that during the confusion of an accident at Walsall, when the deputy-governor was killed and the coachman and one of the warders seriously injured, one of the prisoners, more enterprising than his fellows, managed to steal the master-key from the dead official's body, and, with his fellows, plotted an escape from the long journey to Botany Bay. Brought from Walsall to Birmingham by another coach, they were lodged for the night in Moor Street prison, and the following morning, still chained together, placed on the "Eclipse" coach for London, in charge of the remaining warder and another from Birmingham. This consignment of gaolbirds, together with their guardians, formed the sole passengers by the "Eclipse." In the "lonely spot" aforesaid four of the convicts, having unlocked their fetters, rose suddenly up, seized the coachman and guard, and stopped the coach, while others overpowered their custodians. They explained that they had no wish to harm any one, but were determined at all costs to make a dash for liberty; and, securing coachman, guard, and the bewildered warders with ropes and straps, unharnessed the horses, and, mounting them, galloped across country. Coming upon a roadside blacksmith's forge, they compelled the smith to unloose the remaining portion of their fetters, and then disappeared. All are said to

have afterwards been recaptured, with the exception of two "gentlemen" forgers, who were never again heard of.

A grossly incorrect account of this happening is to be found in the pages of Colonel Birch-Reynardson's *Down the Road*. The coachman and guard of the "Eclipse" were Robert Hassall and Peck. Hassall ended his days as a hopeless lunatic. His affliction was caused by witnessing the sudden death of his colleague and friend at Coventry. While the horses were being changed at that city, Peck busied himself on the roof of the coach, in unstrapping some luggage. The strap broke, and the unfortunate man fell backwards on to the pavement, dashing his skull to pieces. Hassall, who was seated on the box, fainted; and, on regaining consciousness, became a raving lunatic.

A curious feature of the milestones across Dunsmore, a feature not met with elsewhere, is their being cut into the shape of two or more steps, resembling "louping-on" stones, or "upping-blocks," for the convenience of horsemen.

XL

It is here, five miles and a half from Dunchurch, that the famous "Knightlow Cross" stands. Just past a group of cottages, and an inn

called Frog Hall, that mark the neighbourhood of Stretton-upon-Dunsmore, and where Knightlow Hill begins to tip downwards, this mysterious relic is found, in a meadow. The so-called "Knightlow Cross" is a square block of red sandstone, standing on the summit of a pre-

KNIGHTLOW CROSS.

historic grassy tumulus. It measures thirty inches square, and has a deep square cavity sunk in it. From its appearance, the stone may once have been the socket of a wayside or boundary cross, possibly marking the limits of the parish of Ryton-upon-Dunsmore, extending

thus far. Here, from time immemorial, on the morning of St. Martin's Day, November 11th, has been collected the "wroth-money" annually due to the Lord of the Manor of Knightlow Hundred: a district comprising some twenty-eight villages. These tributary communities pay sums ranging from one penny to two shillings and threepence-halfpenny each, with the exception of Ryton, which pays nothing. The whole amounts to nine shillings and threepence-halfpenny, the forfeit for non-payment in each case being either one pound for every penny not forthcoming, or "a white bull with pink nose and ears." This tribute is said to be paid for the privilege of using certain roads, but it probably was originally "rother money," or fees payable in very ancient days to the Lord of Manor for the privilege of grazing cattle and swine in the great forests that then overspread the district, and for having all such animals officially branded by the Lord's verderer; strange and unmarked beasts being liable to confiscation.

At the beginning of last century the "Wroth Money" custom was discontinued, but revived after some years. The Duke of Buccleuch, the present Lord of the Manor, upholds what the villagers call "the old charter"; and still with every recurring Martinmas, at the shivery hour of sunrise, the Steward of the Manor attends and duly checks the coins thrown into the hollow by the representatives of the subject parishes. The tribute, and perhaps a good deal

more, is expended in drinks of rum and milk for the party, and breakfast at the "Oak," at Stretton. The "initiation of the colts" is a humorous contribution levied upon those who have never before been present.

Of the four fir-trees that once guarded the tumulus, locally supposed to mark the spot where four knights were buried, only one now remains; sycamore saplings have taken the places of the others.

Through Ryton-upon-Dunsmore, and past pretty Willenhall, with the Warwickshire Avon crossing under the road and seven tall poplars fringing it, Coventry is reached, over Whitley Common, once a lonely spot, horrific by reason of being Coventry's place of execution. Old maps give the picture of a structure like a football goal at this point, ominously permanent, and labelled "Gallows." It was not until shortly after 1831, when Mary Anne Higgins was hanged here for poisoning her uncle, that Whitley Common lost its old notoriety. Even so, the present directions to the stranger enquiring the way into Coventry are scarcely cheerful, the cemetery being the guiding landmark. Beyond that evidence of the populous nature of Coventry, commence the outskirts of that city; the road still with a kind of a furtive back door approach, with many twists and turns and narrow passes through picturesque slums as far as the very centre of the place. The entrance from London, in fact, remains the most difficult and crooked

of any town all the way to Holyhead, and this although it stands as an improvement upon what had been before 1827, when Telford cut a new length of road here. The only good entrance to Coventry is from the railway station and along Hertford Street, an improvement made in 1812 in place of Greyfriars Lane; a steep, narrow, and cobble-stoned way that was once the only road in that direction.

Coventry's lanes possessing every possible disability and inconvenience from the coachman's point of view, it was, when the question of reforming the Holyhead Road was being debated, seriously proposed that a new route should be adopted, avoiding the city altogether. The proposition failed, and resulted in a compromise that did little real good, even though it cost £11,000. As an indignant writer of that period remarks: "Individual interest was allowed to have its weight, and the traveller is still jolted through the long and narrow streets, uttering imprecations at every yard of his progress." It is a thrilling picture thus presented to the imagination, the traveller cursing as he goes, and recalls Swift's proposition for a Swearers' Bank, enriched by funded damns. If he could have estimated a good income from the number of good, hearty oaths uttered in one day at a little Connaught fair, riches surely beyond the dreams of avarice would have accrued to a branch of the Bank at Coventry.

These "private interests" were, of course,

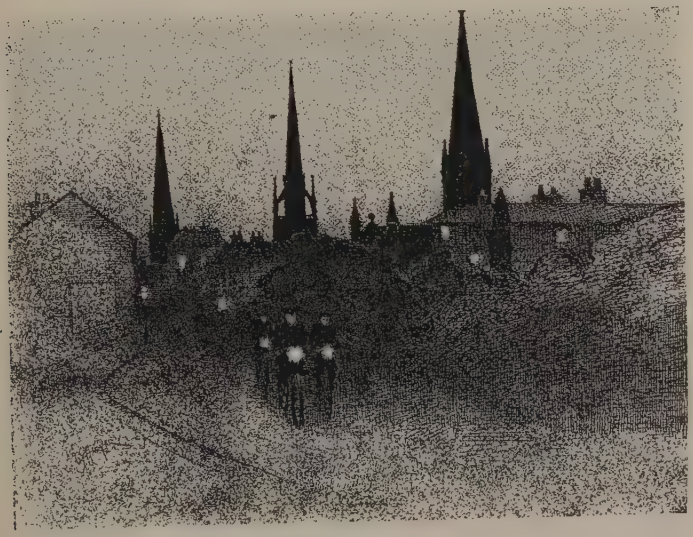
those of the innkeepers and the tradesmen, and they secured the continuance of the old route into the city, while permitting the not so urgent alteration of the exit toward Birmingham, where no trade would be disturbed by making what is now the so-called "Holyhead Road," and deserting the "Old Allesley Road."

The maze of Much Park Street, Earl Street, and High Street, brings one to the centre of Coventry at the intersection of that last-named thoroughfare with Hertford Street, Broadgate, and Smithford Street, and directly opposite the "King's Head," once a famous old coaching inn, but rebuilt these later years. The great Duke of Wellington breakfasted in the old house, November 28th, 1823, on returning from a shooting party at Beaudesert, the Staffordshire seat of the Marquis of Anglesey, with whom he had been at shooting parties of a very different character, in the Peninsula and at Waterloo.

XLI

One sees the city perhaps to best advantage from the Warwick road, or from the rising ground at Stivichall, close by. There below lies Coventry, the famous trinity whence comes the familiar name of the City of the Three

Spires, silhouetted against the calm evening sky. The view recalls that eloquent passage where Ruskin, speaking with enthusiasm of the old coaching age that he had known, paints the joy of the traveller "who from the long-hoped-for turn in the dusty perspective of the causeway, saw for the first time the towers of



THE THREE SPIRES.

some famed city, faint in the rays of sunset, and came to his appointed inn after "hours of peaceful and thoughtful pleasure, for which the rush of the arrival in the railway station is perhaps not always, or to all men, an equivalent."

Those three spires still advise the stranger, to whose ears by some strange chance the fame

of ancient Coventry has not come, that he is indeed about to enter, not merely the great home of the cycle-making industry, but a city that has for centuries been famous for its religious houses, and was indeed a place notable in this wise before ever the Battle of Hastings was fought, to bring England under a Norman domination. Its very name, whence the present form has been evolved, is held by some to have been originally "Conventre," or Convent Town, and it came in after years to own, not three, but seven spires. The other four went down in the days of spoliation that came in with Harry VIII.

Earl Leofric, the pious founder of the original Greyfriars monastery around whose religious buildings secular Coventry first arose, must have been a hard man, if legends tell truth, for his grinding taxation aroused the pity of his Countess, the immortal Godiva. Those must have been no slight hardships that could have earned the compassion of a Saxon gentlewoman, whose times and training alike could only have made her look upon the miseries of the lower orders as incidental to their lot. They were chiefly churls; men and women of bondage, and mere chattels, who had, it is true the accidental advantages of speech and a modicum of understanding; but, for the rest, were of no account.

Tennyson has "shaped the city's ancient legend" into verse, and reveals the circum-

stances that led to his doing so, in the opening lines :—

> I waited for the train at Coventry ;
> I hung with grooms and porters on the bridge.

Waiting for a railway train is so unpromising a prelude to a mediæval legend that at the first blush a processional "train" is understood, and certainly a practical man would wait on the platform, rather than the bridge, for the train to London or Birmingham But Tennyson actually *did* allude to the railway, and if he shaped the legend while he waited, the train must have been very late, for the poem is a long one. These unpromising circumstances perhaps account for its unequal merit, and for the figure of fun that Leofric, "the grim Earl," is unintentionally made to represent, with "his beard a foot before him and his hair a yard behind." It is a tripping music-hall line, and the words those of a comic song. Not even a Duke—nay, nor a King—in these days of vulgar boys and popular songs, could dare defy the current prejudice in favour of a close crop, and so the Tennysonian Leofric suffers accordingly.

Leofric, so says the ancient legend, consented to remove the tax if his Countess would ride unclothed through the streets of Coventry. This, as he thought it a thing impossible for her to do, was his grimly humorous way of refusing to satisfy her compassionate pleadings.

But she took him at his word, and thus, "clothed on with chastity," rode the length of the town, her hair, we are told, in competition with Leofric's own yard-length, falling about her in golden masses, shielding her person from the shameless sun.

Coventry that day was a city of the dead. None stirred, or might stir, out of doors while the pious Godiva rode her enfranchising pilgrimage, and all faces were turned from curtained and shuttered windows. All, that is to say, save one. A graceless tailor, whose name has been handed down to us as "Peeping Tom," looked out from a hole he had bored in a shutter, and we are asked to believe that he was blinded by the wrath of Heaven for his presumption. "The story of Peeping Tom is well known," says Wigstead, writing in 1797; adding, "This effigy is now to be seen next door to the 'King's Head' inn, said to be the very house from whence he attempted to gratify his curiosity." Peeping Tom, in fact, is a personage whom Coventry will not willingly resign to oblivion. Representations of that "low churl, compact of thankless earth," have been numerous in the city. Not so long since there were three, all spying from their several positions down upon the streets, and certainly the one Wigstead mentions is still in evidence, not now "next door" to the "King's Head," but built into a blank window of that rebuilt hostelry. If tailors dressed thus in Saxon days, they must

have been gorgeous persons. But the effigy, looking like that of an Admiral from some comic opera, is not older than a century and a half, and is perhaps a portion of a figure carried in the Godiva processions that at intervals

PEEPING TOM.

have paraded Coventry's streets for many years past. They do so now, but whether the obvious wig and the pink silk tights of the music-hall woman, representing Godiva, commend themselves as realising the old legend, is a matter of individual taste.

To tell Coventry's long story is not the purport of these pages. Much of it is inseparable from the history of England. History in that more spacious sort was making when, in the reign of Richard II., the Dukes of Hereford and Norfolk fought their duel on Gosford Green, in 1398. Richard banished both: Norfolk for life and Hereford for ten years; but Hereford was back within a year and proclaimed King, and Richard deposed and murdered in the dungeons of Pontefract.

A hundred years later, Coventry's beautiful hospitals and the noble St. Mary's Hall, the home of the great trading guilds, began to rise. They remain, in greater or less preservation, until the present time; and perhaps there is nothing in the kingdom to surpass the exquisite beauty of Ford's Hospital—an almshouse built in 1529, whose tiny courtyard of traceried woodwork should for its delicacy be under the protection of a glass case. Six years after Ford's beautiful almshouse was built, the dissolution of the monasteries took place throughout the land; and Coventry, fostered by the great religious houses of the Whitefriars and the Greyfriars in its midst, shared in the ruin that befel them. Its population fell from 15,000 to 3,000 in a few years. Yet it was in this melancholy period that the great "Coventry Cross" arose. It was, however, not a building erected by the city, but the gift of one of its sons, who could find no other way of employing his superfluous wealth.

FORD'S HOSPITAL.

It rose in all the majesty of carved pinnacles, tabernacled statuary, and gilded bannerets, in the market-place of Cross Cheaping: a sight to dazzle the eyes of all who beheld it. The Cross was repaired and re-gilded in 1669; but from that time, although the city was prosperous again, it fell into decay and was removed in 1771.

Coventry is a city by ancient right of the time when there were Bishops of Coventry and Lichfield. The style of the See was afterwards reversed, and the scanty ruins of Coventry's Abbey Church or Cathedral alone tell of that ancient dignity. The encircling walls, too, of Coventry are gone. They kept out many unwelcome visitors in their existence of three hundred years, and behind them the citizens withstood the Royalists of 1642 with such effect that the memory of it rankled twenty years later, when the Restoration brought the Stuarts back again, and Charles II. ordered the fortifications to be destroyed. It was to the Civil War that the expression of "sending to Coventry" any objectionable person owes its origin. Every one knows that this means the social ostracism—the "cutting"—of those thus punished; but its original meaning is not so commonly understood. It derives from Birmingham, where the townspeople took up a hostile attitude towards the Royalists, overwhelming scattered parties and sending them prisoners to Coventry. A very excellent reason for not keeping them at Birmingham was that the town had no defences

and no prisons, while Coventry was a fortress-city and had both.

"True as Coventry blue" would, in view of this old attitude, seem a saying ill-applied to a place of Puritan politics; but it referred to a dye then used here. When Ogilby came to Coventry in the compilation of his great road-book, he noted its position "on the little river Sherborne, whose water is peculiar for the Blue Dye." Even then, it will be seen, the city was beginning to recover from the decay of a hundred years before.

XLII

Romance did not leave Coventry with the passing of mediæval days. It merely changed its aspect; doffed the "armour bright" the romancists love to tell of, and went clad instead in russet; put away helm and pike and broadsword, and sat the livelong day at the loom; changed indeed the Romance of Warfare for that of Industry, so that it was possible for old travellers to remark "the noise of the looms assails the passengers' ears in every direction." Coming in later years upon its discarded old warlike panoply of steel, Coventry has fashioned it anew, in the form of bicycles, for the needs of a peaceful age.

Tennyson, in *Godiva*, writing—

> We, the latest seed of Time,
> New men, that in the flying of a wheel
> Cry down the past,

seems to foreshadow the bicycle, but the early period at which that poem was produced forbids any such allusion. We must needs, therefore, look upon those lines as prophetic, especially since, regarded in any other way, the phrase "the flying of a wheel" appears meaningless. But, even in the light of a prophetic inspiration, is not the cut at the "new men" who "cry down the past" an ill description of the typical cyclist, who uses his flying wheel as a means of communing with Nature and antiquity?

Coventry became earnestly industrial when jousts ceased; and its industries, in their rise and fall, have had their own romance. There were, of course, Coventry makers of woollens; pinners and needlers; girdlers, loriners, and many other tradespeople in the days of chivalry; but it was only in modern times that the industries of silk-weaving and dyeing, ribbon-making and watch-making arose, to give a fugitive prosperity to the place before the cycle industry came to confer upon it a greater boon. Those trades have gone elsewhere; but ask even the most ignorant for what Coventry is famous nowadays, and you get for answer "cycle manufacturing." Yet before 1869 that industry was unborn, and the trade of Coventry at the

lowest ebb. Silk-weaving and ribbon-making had then been dealt a deadly blow by the removal of the duty from foreign goods of that nature, and French ribbons and silks of new designs, and at low prices, poured in. Coventry weavers and dyers were ruined. At the same time, cheap Swiss watches had cut out the local watch-making trade, so that work grew scarce and starvation presently began to stalk the streets. That was a dark hour in Coventry's modern chapter of romance, an hour brightened by the efforts of one man in particular—James Marriott—to establish a new industry. Those were the first days of a new invention—the sewing machine—and Marriott thought he saw means of setting afoot a great manufacture of that labour-saving device. He contributed £500 to the formation of a business, and was joined by others, and together they establised the Coventry Sewing Machine Company, an enterprise that failed to realise the hopes centred in it. But in that failure, unknown to those gallant pioneers, lay the seed of success. Their plant was lying idle, and might have been dispersed but for a happy providence: the appearance in France of the velocipede.

The velocipede was by no means the first attempt of the kind to aid locomotion on highways. Indeed, in Boswell's *Life of Johnson* there may be found a reference, under date of 1769, to a "new-invented machine" that went without horses. A man sat in it and turned a

handle, which worked a spring, which drove the machine forward. The criticism Johnson levelled against this device was one that will probably appeal powerfully to all cyclists who have stored up in their memories horrid experiences of hill-climbing and head-winds. "What is gained," said the learned Doctor, "is the man has the choice whether he will move himself alone, or himself and the machine too." Nothing came of that invention, and it was not until 1816 that the "Hobby Horse," as it afterwards became known, was devised in Paris by a M. Niepce He named it a "Celeripede." This machine, improved by a Baron von Drais, of Mannheim, does not appear to have found its way to England until the autumn of 1818, when a coach-maker of Long Acre, one Dennis Johnson by name, introduced it as a "Pedestrian Curricle." From 1819 to 1830 this machine – the popularly-named "Hobby Horse"—enjoyed a certain favour, although on country roads it could but seldom have been seen, for no one could ride it twenty miles and remain in an able-bodied condition. Its mere weight was appalling, constructed as it was of two heavy wooden wheels shod with iron, and held together by a stout bar of timber. For saddle, the rider had a cushion, and leant his chest against another cushion, supported by ironwork. Bestriding this fearsome contrivance, the adventurous rider's feet easily reached the ground. As the Hobby Horse had no cranks or pedals, the method of propulsion was that

of running in this straddling position until a sufficient impetus had been gained, when the lumbering machine would carry its owner a short distance on the flat. It was, of course, impossible to ride up even the slightest rise; but, considering the momentum likely to be accumulated by a mass of iron and wood, scaling considerably over a hundredweight, the pace down hill must have been furious enough.

By 1830 the Hobby Horse had disappeared, and it was not until 1839–40 that the first machine with cranks was invented by a Scots blacksmith, Kirkpatrick Macmillan, who produced a rear-driving dwarf bicycle that foreshadowed the type now popular. Several machines of this kind were made and sold by Macmillan, but they did not attain a lasting vogue; and it was not until a French mechanic—one Pierre Lallemont—in 1865 or 1866 designed the front-driving velocipede in the workshops of Michaux & Cie, of Paris, that the second era of cycling began. It was this machine that Michaux exhibited at the Paris Exhibition of 1867. It was seen either then or the following year in Paris by Mr. R. B. Turner, agent in that city for the Coventry Sewing Machine Company. He, together with Charles Spencer and John Mayall, junior, became a pioneer of cycling in this country. In the pages of the BRIGHTON ROAD, details of their first long-distance ride, February 17th, 1869, may be found.

But Turner not only became an enthusiastic

cyclist: he drew the attention of his firm to what at once proved to be a profitable manufacture, supplementing, and eventually taking the place of, the declining sewing-machine business. The style of the firm was altered to the "Coventry Machinists Company," and "boneshakers," as Velocipedes were speedily nicknamed, began to be turned out in considerable numbers. The "boneshaker" was well named. It had a solid iron frame, and wooden wheels with iron tyres, and was only a degree less weighty than the Hobby Horse itself, of ponderous memory. Its front wheel was the larger, and was the driving-wheel, fitted with "treadles," as pedals were then named. The machine turned the scale at 93 lb.

Thus, in 1869, the pastime of cycling and the industry of cycle manufacture found a beginning on these shores. In that year the actual word "bicycle" was first introduced, to eventually render "Velocipede" obsolete. When the first syllable of "bicycle" and "bicycling" was dropped is a more difficult matter to determine. The present use grew gradually, as one by one the different bicycling and tricycling clubs sloughed off those cumbrous prefatory distinctions, as unnecessary and unwieldy; but certainly the modern use was known by 1879, when the '*Cyclist* was established, with the half-apologetic ' that may even yet be seen on its engraved title-page. Two years earlier, when the *Bicycling News* was founded, the elision of the distinguishing syllable was evidently not foreseen.

In the years following the introduction of the "boneshaker," this new industry prospered and increased in an eminently solid way. Boneshaking was not a pastime for the many, and it was not until the old "ordinary," as it is still called, was introduced that the youth of that period went bicycling in any great numbers. The "ordinary," or high bicycle, long since become extraordinary by supersession in favour of the dwarf "safety," was gradually evolved through the middle Seventies to 1880. It was probably an early example of this build that so terribly frightened the rustic in *Punch*, who, going home in the dark, was scared by an "awful summat" he declared to be "a man a-ridin' on nawthin'."

It was a graceful, albeit exceedingly dangerous type, and from its height of fifty-eight inches a rider surveyed the world as he went at a lordly altitude. The reverse of that commanding eminence was found when he was thrown: a happening that recurred with remarkable frequency and a nerve-shaking unexpectedness. Little in the shape of ruts or stones was required to upset the "ordinary," and few long rides were ever made without a "spill." To be shot off suddenly in mid-air was in fact so to be looked for, that riders studied how to fall, and practised the art so well that, although involuntary flights were many, serious injuries were few. The height of this art or science was to fall clear of the machine—an object attained, down hill, by riding with the legs over the handle-

bars, when, in the event of an accident, one fell a greater or shorter distance, according to the speed or the force of the shock.

The "ordinary" was at its height, in measurement and popularity, in 1880, a year that also marked the palmiest period of cycling

THE "OLD ORDINARY."

clubs. The cyclist of that era made a brave show. Arrayed in a tight-fitting uniform, that in its frogged patrol-jacket and gauntlet gloves aped military costume, and in its tight breeches made the sudden strain of a fall the utter dissolution of those garments, his was a wonderful figure as he wended his uncertain way, gazing from his point of vantage over the countryside.

But as his first youth waned, and his agility with it, rendering the exercise of vaulting into the saddle increasingly more of an enterprise, the cyclist yearned for a less giddy height than that of the "ordinary," and his growing infirmities, more than any other consideration, eventually brought about the modern geared-up, rear-driving, dwarf bicycle the "safety"; but Time, the cynic, that has robbed the term "ordinary" of its meaning, has brought about many more fatal cycling accidents in these "safety" days than occurred in the era of the high bicycle.

XLIII

It was the late J. K. Starley's "Rover" of 1885 that opened the way for cycling's modern development. It was a design rightly claimed to have "set the fashion to the world," and the difference between it and patterns of the current season is only in detail. Already, before Starley, attempts had been made to produce a "safety," as shown by Lawson's patent of 1876 and his "bicyclette" of 1880, together with the designs by Shergold and Bate in 1876 and later, in which 26- to 30-inch wheels, provided with gear, were to do the work of the 56- and 58-inch

ungeared wheel. But none of these designs attained any commercial success.

The "Rover" brought many thousands more into the ranks of cyclists, and gave an added prosperity to Coventry, but what has been called the "great boom" was yet to come. A contributory cause of that event, although antedating it by some six years, was the introduction of the pneumatic tyre. So long ago as 1845 a pneumatic rubber tyre for carriages had been invented by Thompson, and forgotten, and it was not until 1888 that Mr. J. B. Dunlop designed the first pattern of the tyre bearing his name. Like many another epoch-making invention, its importance was originally not so much as guessed at, and it was only as a home-made device for securing the easy running of his children's cycles that it first came into being. It began to be manufactured in 1889, and certainly since 1891 pneumatic tyres for cycles have been universal. They practically first rendered it possible for ladies to adopt the pastime, and first made cycling luxurious, rather than necessarily an athletic exercise. The result was the "boom" that began in the early summer of 1895.

Suddenly, from being looked down upon by all who pretended to any culture or social consideration, cycling became fashionable. Cyclists, who had cycled ever since the days when Edmund Yates in the *World*, speaking for Society, had bitterly called them "cads on

castors," smiled sardonically when they saw all Mayfair and St. James's cycling in Hyde or Battersea Parks, and submitted to be knocked down by wobbling novices—Earls and Countesses —upon the road with an ill grace. It is a mad world, and time brings strange revenges in it.

No one, least of all the cycle manufacturers of Coventry, had any prevision of the great "boom." In former years business had eased off with the coming of summer. "Previously to 1895," said a representative of the trade, "business was sound, and all the best houses did well, but were more or less subject to a very dull period, lasting from the beginning of August until the end of November. This period began slowly, and, reaching its dullest point about the end of October, caused much distress among the more improvident workers. There was no slack time in 1895, *and you know what* '96 *was.*"

Toil how they might through the twenty-four hours, the factories of Coventry could not keep pace with the demand. Orders came in quicker than cycles were despatched, and every little metal-working firm went into cycle-making, while thousands upon thousands of mechanics flocked into the "city of the boom." Any one could find work and good wages in Coventry, but the rush was so great that many could find no lodgings, and payment was frequently offered for shelter in the local workhouse, offers that, of course, could not be entertained. In some cases cycle manufacturers provided their new hands

with temporary accommodation in their works. The population, numbering in 1891 58,503, rose at once by 10,000. To meet this influx, building operations were feverishly begun, and street upon street of entirely new suburbs began to rise.

And for a time the "boom" continued. Newer and immensely large factories were built on the strength of it, and during 1897 the output of cycles rose to an extraordinary height.

It was the Company Promoter who killed all this prosperity. Unscrupulous men, versed in all the dark ways of the financial world, found their opportunity in those palmy days, and, purchasing and amalgamating, converted prosperous private firms into unwieldy and over-capitalised public companies. In the thick of all this juggling with millions, and snatching of commissions and vendors' profits, the bubble burst, and an honourable and highly prosperous industry was wrecked, and became a bye-word and a reproach all the world over. The events of 1898 make a painful retrospect. Noblemen who bore ancient and honourable titles were publicly accused as common touts and commission agents engaged in hoodwinking the public, and even ready, when opportunity offered, to cheat one another. The scandal struck the heaviest blow to the House of Lords and hereditary legislation that that House and that principle of government have ever suffered.

The professional Company Promoter we have

had with us ever since Limited Liability brought him into being, and bitter experience during a generation and a half has enabled the public to at last gain a just view of him and his methods; but the public, at that time, still looked upon a nobleman as, almost of necessity, a man of honour. The revelations that followed this sudden crash dispelled that fond belief, and poisoned confidence at its very spring-head. The Society "boom" had already ended, and the bursting of the financial bubble left the once flourishing industry disorganised. Ever since that unhappy year of 1898 Coventry has witnessed a melancholy succession of failures, and has seen factory after factory closed. Only recently has cycle manufacturing begun to recover from that staggering blow. Yet, apart from such considerations as the waxing and waning fortunes of financiers, or of manufacturers and their hirelings among professional racing cyclists, cycling as a pastime has been steadily progressive. Where one person rode a "bone-shaker," twenty bestrode the high bicycle; and, nowadays, for every twenty who perched on the perilous eminence of the old "ordinary," two hundred are found upon the modern cycle. The industry is thus endowed with elasticity and strong recuperative powers, so that in this saner period Coventry is doing a great deal more than merely holding its own, even though many other towns have secured a share in the business of cycle production.

Here, then, for the present, ends Coventry's romance. There be those who look forward to a new and stirring chapter of it, in a wished-for manufacture of motor-cars; but the future lies on the knees of the gods, to order as they will.

XLIV

COACHING history at Coventry begins in 1658, with the establishment of a stage-coach between London, Lichfield, and Chester. This pioneer, starting from the "George" Inn, Holborn Bridge, reached Coventry in three days, or professed to do so. Suspicions that this was only a profession, not often put into practice, are aroused by the title of a new coach, put on the road in 1739. This was the "London, Birmingham, and Lichfield Flying Coach," that took just the same time to reach Coventry, and yet arrogated the term "flying" to itself, as a superior recommendation above all earlier conveyances. The fare between London and Coventry was 25*s*. In 1773 a wonderful thing happened, for in that year the "Coventry Flying Machine" winged its way in one day. Later coaches belong to the road in general, and Coventry was but an incident on the way; but there were many short

distances covered by local coaches, such as the "Peeping Tom" and the "Manchester Hero," between this and Manchester, and numerous others to Birmingham, Lichfield, Warwick, Leamington, Cheltenham, and Stratford-on-Avon. A "Little Wonder" Coventry and Birmingham stage ran in the last years of coaching. Tom Pinner, its driver, was an expert with the whip, and could snatch the pipe out of a wayfarer's mouth with it, and not touch him, as he drove along. One quite expects, in reading Tom Pinner's career, to light upon the record of one of the victims of these little pleasantries waiting for their author and pounding him into a jelly; but no one ever seems to have had sufficient spirit.

Besides the "King's Arms," there were the "Queen's Head," the "Bull," and the "White Bear" prominent among Coventry inns. The "Bull" stood where the Barracks are now situated, in Smithford Street. The "White Bear," in High Street, changed its sign in 1811 to the "Craven Arms"; a name it still retains. The change was made out of compliment to the third Earl of Craven, who had then returned to live at Combe Abbey, a family seat near Coventry that had long been closed. His residence there brought much custom to the city and to the house.

The old inn remains just as it was in coaching days. There are the long yard, with stables of Elizabethan date, and the solid red-brick

portions of the house, rebuilt in the time when George III. was King, facing the narrow passage. Fronting on the street, the building is of old white-painted plaster. It was in front of the "Craven Arms" that the fatal accident, already recounted, to Tom Peck, the guard of the "Eclipse" coach, happened. Opposite was one of the many coach offices; the scene, perhaps, of that story of the little girl being booked over-night at half-price, as the custom was. Her elder sister took the seat in the morning, when the book-keeper remarked to her mother, "Your little girl has grown in the night."

One of the last relics of old times went, unhonoured, in 1872, when the turnpike-gates on either side of Coventry were abolished; and a long-enduring link was broken when Thomas Clarke died, in Coventry Hospital, April, 1899. Clarke was, according to the newspapers chronicling the event, the "oldest postboy in England." Not a few, also, proclaimed him to be "the last"; but last postboys have been dying in considerable numbers since then, and modest paragraphs in the daily papers still appear, now and again, recording the passing of another. The Last Postboy, indeed, is not yet, and those paragraphs are not uncommonly followed by letters from survivors, who are always found to write and claim the honour for themselves. They are as inexhaustible as the widow's cruise of oil, pieces of the True Cross,

or relics of the saints in Roman Catholic churches. When the traveller of experience has seen the skull of St. Jerome in one place, he is not surprised to be shown another somewhere else, for he has already seen five thigh bones of some other saint at different shrines, and knows that, if he perseveres, he will probably find some more. Just in the same way, there is always another postboy when the last has died. They were—or are, we must perhaps say—a long-lived race, all bone and gristle; without a spare ounce of flesh for disease to fasten upon, and, inured for long years to hard work in all weathers, little affected in old age by the chills and bitter winds that carry off the less hardy among elderly folks. The coachman was of another kind. He sat on his box all the time, and grew fat in fingering the ribbons; while the postboy bumped his flesh away on horseback. Did any one ever see a fat postboy? And was it not the exception for a coachman to be lean? His fatness long since carried off the last coachman of the old days, but the

Three jolly postboys, drinking at the Dragon,

who, in the words of the old chorus, "determined to finish off the flagon," are probably still living, in a hale and lean old age, although coaches, and chaises, and all the old life of the road have gone, and the "Dragon" itself no longer looks down the dusty highway.

THE OLD "KING'S HEAD," COVENTRY. *From a Print after Rowlandson.*

Sixty years before, Clarke had seen the railway come to Coventry, and bring many changes in its wake, among them the rebuilding of the comfortable old inns. He was old enough to have driven Mr. Pickwick, or Mr. Pickwick's originator, on that remarkably wet journey from Birmingham to Towcester. It was probably at the old "King's Head" that the postchaise team was changed that night. When they stopped, the steam ascended from the horses in such clouds as wholly to obscure the ostler, whose voice was, however, heard to declare from the mist that he expected the first Gold Medal from the Humane Society, on their next distribution of awards, for taking the postboy's hat off; the water descending from the brim of which, the invisible gentleman declared, must inevitably have drowned him (the postboy) but for his great presence of mind in tearing it promptly from his head, and drying the gasping man's countenance with a wisp of straw.

Here it was that Sam Weller, "lowering his voice to a mysterious whisper," asked Bob Sawyer if he had ever "know'd a churchyard where there was a postboy's tombstone," or had ever seen a dead postboy."

"No!" rejoined Bob, "I never did."

"No!" rejoined Sam, triumphantly, "nor never will; and there's another thing that no man never see, and that's a dead donkey. No man never see a dead donkey"; adding

that, "without goin' so far as to as-sert, as some wery sensible people do, that postboys and donkeys is both immortal, wot I say is this; that wenever they feels theirselves gettin' stiff and past their work, they just rides off together, wun postboy to a pair in the usual way; wot becomes on 'em nobody knows, but its werry probable as they starts away to take their pleasure in some other vorld, for there ain't a man alive as ever see either a donkey or a postboy a-taking his pleasure in this!"

The "King's Head," as already hinted, has been rebuilt in the stained glass and glitter style, and is quite uninteresting, save for the effigy of "Peeping Tom," moved from the frontage of a neighbouring old house, peering curiously from an upper storey.

XLV

Crossing the intersection of Hertford Street and Broad Gate at this point, the Holyhead Road leads out of Coventry by way of Smithford Street and Fleet Street. Before the revolutionary time of Telford, it continued through Spon End and Spon Gate and reached Allesley along the winding route now known as the "Old Allesley Road, passing two toll-gates on the way. The "new" road branches off to the

COVENTRY, FROM WINDMILL HILL. *After J. M. W. Turner, R.A.*

right immediately after passing St. John's church and, passing a long factory-like row of old weavers' houses, and climbing uphill at first, goes afterwards flat and straight to Allesley, in two miles. "Windmill Hill," as it was called, was not a very exalted height, but from it in the old days a quite panoramic view of Coventry was obtainable. It is the view, now blotted out by intervening houses, seen in Turner's noble picture of the city. In it you see the hollow road, with St. John's tower at the bottom, and coaches toiling up, on the way to Birmingham; in the distance the neighbouring spires of Trinity and St. Michael's, with Christ Church aloof, on the right. Turner took his stand on the hill-crest, where Meriden Street branches off to the right; but where the grassy banks then sloped steeply to the road, and the sheep roamed free, suburban villas now cover the hillside, the retaining walls of their gardens masking the rugged old earth-banks.

A red-brick toll-gate marks the junction of old and new roads at the entrance of Allesley, a pretty roadside village on a hillside. There were at one time two very large and busy coaching inns here, the "Windmill" and the "White Lion," and here they stand even now; not as inns, it is true, but structurally unaltered. Very handsome red-brick buildings they are, belonging to the Georgian and Queen Anne periods: the "White Lion," once famed for its

cheesecakes and home-brewed ale, prominent as the largest building in the village street, and now divided into two houses; the "Windmill" half a mile away, standing back in a meadow and used as a farmhouse.

Meriden, the next item upon the way, is heralded by a steeply descending hill; the village below, the church solitary upon the hill-top. Meriden church is quite a little museum of antiquities, and a well-kept one, with everything carefully labelled for the information of the chance visitor — and the door unlocked. Here one finds the effigies of two worthy Warwickshire knights of the fifteenth century, a chained Prayer Book, and the processional staves of a bygone village club, together with a curious old oak alms-chest, dated 1627 and inscribed:

> This chest is God's exchequer, paye in then
> Your almes accepted both of God and men.

"Mireden," as it was invariably called by old-time travellers, is situated on an "uncommonly deep" bed of clay in the hole at the foot of this hill. Pennant, the antiquary, is responsible for the statement that the village was named Alspath until the time of Henry VI., "about which time, becoming a great thoroughfare, it got the name of Myreden—'den' signifying a bottom, and 'myre' dirt; and I can well vouch for the propriety of the appellation before the institution of turnpikes."

In his time, between 1739 and 1782, the road at Meriden had been so far improved that travellers no longer stuck in the clay. It had become a turnpike, and, on the testimony of Pennant, "excellent." But the crest of the hill had still to be climbed, and the depth of the valley to be descended into, before the advent of Telford, some forty years later, when the cutting on the hill-top and the embankment in the hollow were made. The old road—a steep and narrow track—is seen down below, on the right hand, in descending Meriden Hill, and beside it the old "Queen's Head," with frontage rebuilt in recent years. Meriden village lies in the succeeding level, with rural cottages on one side of the road, and the ponds and lilied water-courses of Meriden Park on the other; a village green beyond. The houses are still, as in Pennant's day "pretty"; but in the course of a hundred and twenty years the "magnificent inn, famed from time immemorial for its excellent malt liquor," has retired into private occupation, and the "various embellishments made by the old innkeeper, Reynolds—little ponds, statues, and other whims," that used to enliven the spot, have been swept away by Time, like old Reynolds himself.

There were in coaching days no fewer than eight inns and posting-houses of different degrees in Meriden. There are now but two inns: the "Bull's Head," formerly a farm-house, and the "Queen's Head," already mentioned. Among the vanished

signs are the "Nag's Head," "Malt Shovel," "Crown," and "Swan" (now a butcher's shop). The magnificent inn spoken of by Pennant was the old "Bull's Head"; whence the licence was transferred to the smaller house, now so named, at the time when coaching ceased to be. The old house is seen on the right hand, a very large, white-plastered building of good architectural character, now secluded from the road by

THE OLD "BULL'S HEAD," MERIDEN.

a wall and iron palisade, standing where the drive up to the inn was formerly placed. One of the entrances to and exits from the house in coaching and posting times was by the first-floor window, above where the portico, a later addition, is seen. The "Bull's Head" was an exclusive and aristocratic house, and preferred the top-sawyers, who posted in their own "chariots," to those who travelled in hired chaises; while for the mere passengers by mail or stage-coach it

had, at the best, but a contemptuous tolerance. And, indeed, it must have been a lordly place, and, with its surrounding gardens, stables, and picturesque turretted clock-tower, more like a private mansion than a place of public resort. There is still in the turret a dilapidated set of chimes that can, with care and patience, be induced to hammer out a few scattered notes of a tune alleged to be that of "God Save the King," or Queen, as the case may be.

XLVI

Meriden is one of the many reputed "centres of England." Measure a straight line from the North Foreland to Holyhead, and another from the Lizard to the mouth of the Humber, and their intersection will be at Meriden. With an irregularly shaped country like England, this is a somewhat empirical method, and the other reputed centres are evidently obtained by measuring from various places dictated by individual taste and fancy.

The very hub of the country is held to be the ancient cross standing upon the village green—shattered now, and bound together by iron bands. A modern legend that it was originally placed here to mark the centre has

grown up, and by consequence it is sketched and photographed times without number throughout the year.

The "Forest of Arden Archers," or the "Woodmen of Arden," as they sometimes style themselves, an ancient guild revived in 1785, and holding meetings at Forest Hall, near by, remind the forgetful traveller that, like Touch-

MERIDEN CROSS.

stone, he is in Arden, or, at any rate, on the outskirts of it, in passing through Meriden. Henley-in-Arden lies to the left, served by a station, bald of any poetic or romantic suggestion in the title of "Henley Junction."

There remained, not so many years ago, an old inn called the "Up and Down Post," on the road between Meriden and Stonebridge. Its picture-sign, showing two posts, one standing,

the other fallen, quite misrepresented the true meaning of the name, which referred to the old system of posting along the roads. Probably the original sign was a picture showing the up and the down postboys meeting.

The road now grows to a noble width; a quiet road too, at any time but Saturdays and Sundays, when Birmingham and Coventry's all sorts of the cycling kind are let loose upon their eighteen miles between the two cities, and motor cars from afar whiten the hedgerows with dust. The old "Stonebridge" inn, at the crossing of the Lichfield and Leamington roads, has been gorgeously rebuilt, chiefly to meet the requirements of these, and is now the "Stonebridge Hotel." The "stone bridge" itself carries the road across a little stream called the Tame. Another inn, the "Malt Shovel," stands with its old stables in refreshing contrast with that ornate modern hostelry.

A very little exertion will suffice to put the quiet man out of sight and hearing of the crowd. He has only to turn up the lane by the "Clock" inn and make for Bickenhill spire, less than a quarter of a mile away, and he will have the surroundings entirely to himself.

Bickenhill church is very beautiful, but perhaps the most memorable thing connected with it is the notice exposed in the porch:—

> It having been decided by the Court of Queen's Bench, and by the Court of Appeal, that artificial wreaths and glass cases placed

> upon graves without sanction is an illegal act; notice is hereby given that such must not be placed upon graves without first obtaining permission, and such will be regarded as Memorial Tablets, and the customary fees will be charged.

The vicar's grammar would not have found favour with Lindley Murray; but speculations as to how an artificial wreath or a glass case can be made an act, illegal or otherwise, do not form the real interest of this notice. *That* is discovered in the spectacle of two judicial tribunals assuming the rôle of arbiters of taste, and elevating the placing of jampots, enamelled tin wreaths, and the like abominations on graves to illegality. No one can, without mingled feelings of disgust and pity, see the marmalade jars that have held water for flowers, or any artificial things displayed in places with such sacred and melancholy associations, but this would seem to be a question of taste, or the want of it, alone. It would not be a much greater stride for courts of law to determine in what kind of clothes parishioners should attend service. And — another matter. Without defending artificial flowers, are the decayed natural blossoms, shrivelled with heat, and soddened into an obscene and hideous pulp by rains, a pleasing sight? Is it not possible, after all, that the sense of permanency in a glass case or a glass chaplet is a soothing feeling to many a poor mourner who lacks "culture," but whose instincts

THE LIVERPOOL MAIL, 1836. *From a Print after J. Pollard.*

revolt from the rotting lilies and stephanotis of the bereaved rich?

Returning to Stonebridge, the road to Coleshill, and to Castle Bromwich and Lichfield will be seen branching off from the Holyhead Road. Here, until the middle of the eighteenth century, the traffic for Shrewsbury and Chester commonly turned off. After that date, not only were the roads through Birmingham and Wolverhampton improved, but the places themselves grew into greater importance, and the old Chester Road, by consequence, decayed. By 1802 all the Chester coaches had deserted it, but the Liverpool Mail came this way until the last. Up to 1761 this was not the way to Coleshill at all, Until that year the road branched off at a point half a mile from Meriden, and lay through Packington Park. It was a straight and flat road, and convenient for Coleshill, but offensive to Sir Clement Fisher, who then was the squire at Packington Hall. It passed within sight of his windows, and he relaxed no effort until an Act of Parliament was passed, stopping it up, and making the present hilly and circuitous road in its stead. The preamble of the Act, stating that the old road was inconvenient and dangerous, is one of the most audacious falsehoods ever publicly stated. The old road can still be traced in the Park, and standing beside it is an old tombstone, recording the fate of a London tailor struck by lightning when travelling this way.

XLVII

But enough of Packington. Let us on to Birmingham, now but nine miles distant, by Elmdon, Wells Green, and Yardley.

Elmdon, were it not for that pretty roadside timber-framed inn, the 'Cock,' would be but a name and nothing else, so far as the road could show. Passing it, bid a long farewell, O traveller along the Holyhead Road, to the country, for in less than another two miles Wells Green is reached and Birmingham within hail. Thereafter, in nothing less than eighteen miles shall you see the hedgerows, the fields, and the quiet road again. Birmingham and the Black Country intervene, and not until, having gained and overpassed Wolverhampton, you ascend the heights of Tettenhall, will the sun be seen shining in a clear sky once more. Meanwhile, here is Wells Green, the last approach to the likeness of the country on this side of Birmingham, and by consequence a place of great half-holiday and Sunday resort. Midland cyclists are its chief patrons. For them the "Old Original" tea-house caters, for their custom also the "Ship," the "Lighthouse," and many more compete frantically among each other, attracting attention by large and elaborate models of ships, lighthouses, and other objects displayed beside the road. The two old roadside inns—the "Wheatsheaf" and the "Crown"—

have been ornately rebuilt; the "Crown" vulgarly.

Beyond Wells Green the road enters an outlying portion of Worcestershire and comes to Yardley, a new-built Birmingham suburb, whose shops, dotted here and there by the wayside, alternate with barns, cow-houses and hedges, presently to give place to suburban streets and so provide those shops with customers. In the hollow succeeding Yardley, at Hay Mills, where a little stream runs, not yet completely polluted and decently buried from sight in a drain pipe, the mile's length of Worcestershire ends. Hay Mills now belies its idyllic name, for it is here that modern Birmingham definitely begins, and the smoke-cloud and traffic of that great city grow in density.

Small Heath, Bordesley, Deritend, and Digbeth, that are all comprised in the next two and a half miles, are now but the various names distinguishing what would otherwise be one long street, growing gradually more grimy and crowded: a hilly street, where hideous steam tramways, belching smoke and smuts, run noisily, like armoured trains, and where the few old gabled cottages that are left, to tell of times when this was a country road, are closely beset by modern houses, already hung with soot, like the cobwebs on bottles of old port. A dramatic change indeed from what Leland saw, when he journeyed to Birmingham in 1538, and came

"through as pretty a street as ever I entred, into Bermingham towne. This street, as I remember, is called Dirtey." He meant Derit-end, which, if called "Dirtey" to-day would by no means be libelled. "Dirty End" would be an easy change from the real name of the squalid street, and equally descriptive of it.

Wigstead in 1797 tells a tale very different from that of Leland. Instead of a "pretty street," he found an entrance "by no means prepossessing the traveller in its favour—a confused mass of brick and tile rubbish piled together." Birmingham he thought to be an objectionable place. "Enveloped in an almost impenetrable smoky atmosphere," he says, "it is by no means an agreeable object to a picturesque eye."

END OF VOL. I.

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